



Applying the TREE approach

TREE is a practical tool that supports coaches to modify games and activities to be more inclusive and enhance the participant experience. Similar to the CHANGE IT principle, the TREE approach focusses on planning and delivering the modifications needed to make games and activities inclusive and accessible for all ability levels.

T – Teaching (or coaching) style

R – Rules

E – Equipment

E – Environment

A game may need to be modified to provide:

- Inclusion – to meet individual needs and ability levels
- Skill development – to increase or decrease the challenge
- Variety – to challenge participants in different ways
- Increased activity level – to maintain engagement of all participants
- Game strategy – to introduce tactics and promote understanding
- Safety – this should always be the highest priority for all participants

Teaching (or coaching style)

- **Ensure the planned activities create success.** Students will get disengaged quickly if they cannot complete the activity successfully.
- Games are challenging to understand if they have **abstract names**. For example, 'Bunny hops over a bench'. Consider using clear and simple titles that reflect a game's objective.
- **Set the activities to suit the developmental abilities**, not the age of the student. For example, Finger and thumb + Nose & Ear swap will be very challenging, even for high school students. (Gym Skills: Week 6 & 7)
- **Repeating activities** each week can be beneficial to learning, especially when students have not mastered the skill. Introducing new sets of activities each week can also be overwhelming for students to process.
- **Coach/teacher can stand or move alongside** a student to demonstrate the activity and support correct technique where required.
- **Have a 'spotter'** available for students when jumping off equipment.
- **Use specific instructions** so students know exactly what to do. For example:
 - Stand on a green dot
 - Stand with your toes touching the white line
 - Throw the bean bag and try to make it land in the red bucket
 - Run along the yellow line
- **Use terminology like 'move' rather than 'run'**. This is more appropriate for people with limited movement. For example, students in a wheelchair.
- **Consider the student's physical position during an activity.** For example, activities involving students lying down and responding to instructions with reduced visibility could impact learning, as understanding body language, eye contact and lip-reading capabilities are restricted.
- **Pair work and physical contact**, such as holding hands, might cause sensory discomfort. If so, consider if the activity can be performed individually. Always ask teachers for advice.
- **Be positioned so you can see all students.** The coach position is important as students may not verbally communicate their needs and seek face contact for reassurance or guidance. Equally, they will process a lot of information through non-verbal means such as demonstrations, hand gestures, facial expressions.
- When multiple activity stations exist, use **visual aids** for each activity to remind students of the requirements to be performed at each station. (Gym Fun: All Circuit Activities)
- Match players of a **similar ability levels** for partner games.
- **Use appropriate physical assistance** with an understanding of the individual's response to physical or sensory touch. Consider utilising the support of a box, low beam, or chair if a participant in the class requires personal space. (Gym Fun: Partner Jumps)
- **Provide demonstrations** of activities and ask questions to check for understanding. Allow students five seconds to process a question before prompting for a reply.
- **Teach more complex skills in increments** rather than all at once. For example, forward rolls, cartwheels etc.

- **Use visual communication strategies** such as visual schedules, communication cards, simple sign language, and high 5's (where appropriate).
- **Atlantoaxial instability (AAI)** affects up to 20% of people with down syndrome. AAI affects mobility of the first and second vertebrae. Coaches should ask teachers if any students have this condition and if so, participation in gymnastics skills such as forward and backward rolls should be avoided.

Rules

- **Change the rules to enable success.** For example:
 - Play Hoop Group as 'musical statues' if finding a hoop is difficult for some students
(Gym Fun: Hoop Group)
 - 'Lift the Feet' may require a coach to complete rather than students
(Gym Skills: Lift the feet)
 - If the jumping skill is too difficult allow students to step over
- **Keep point scoring to smaller numbers.** For example, use 1, 2, 3 or alternately use a hoop or bucket and provide objects they can manually place in to keep score.
- **Stagger starts** for movement/race games to make any timed games more inclusive.
- Allow the student to **manipulate an object to match their ability.** For example, rolling a ball instead of throwing it.
- Consider recognising **individual achievements** rather than creating competition. For example, students aim to beat their own score rather than other student's scores.
- **Gradually increase degree of difficulty** as skills improve.
- **Rules regarding interaction with others should be clear.** For example, rules about the appropriate position/method to 'tag' someone, especially if they are sensory sensitive.
- **Be aware of safety concerns for partner balances,** especially when lifting body parts. Potentially change this to forming the shapes while lying on the ground.
(Gym Skills: Lift the plank)
- Jumping back and rolling could be harmful for those with **Atlantoaxial instability.** Provide alternatives so all students can achieve success. Always check with teachers prior to the program about this condition.

Equipment

- **Whistles, music, and loud noises in an activity** may cause sensory issues for students. Check with teachers for any of these considerations.
- **To support specific communication, use visual aids** such as coloured dots for participants to stand on, arrows to show the direction they need to run, and foot shapes to show where they need to step/hop/jump etc. (Gym Skills: C'mon do the locomotion)
- **Use a line on the ground to replace a low beam** if necessary.
- Provide students with a **choice of equipment** to suit their ability and sensory needs. For example, different weights, sizes, textures, use of bell balls (goal ball) etc.

- **Use adaptive equipment** such as ramps, to allow participants who are unable to roll or throw objects further distances. Ask the school what adaptive equipment they have.
- **Use a group-sized skipping rope** if students cannot complete the motion of skipping using an individual rope. The teachers and/or coach should hold the ends of the rope. Use a swaying motion on the ground (like a snake) to allow students to jump over.
- **To allow for more reaction time** use a light piece of material or a balloon instead of a bean bag, for students to throw and catch. (Gym Fun: All Bean Bag Activities)
- **Introduce a piece of equipment to avoid body contact** if appropriate. For example, students can hold opposite ends of a scarf, tag or bean bag instead of holding hands (if safe to do so). (Gym Fun: Body Words)
- Instead of a partner, **use a bench or foam block** for lifting activities. (Gym Skills: Lift the plank)
- **Use flat markers/dots instead of hoops to assist mobility.** For example, students in wheelchairs or with limited movement. (Gym Fun + Gym Skills: All Hoop Activities)

Environment

- Where possible, **minimise distractions** such as background noise, lights, and moving objects/people. Choose a space away from elements that might draw the students' attention away from the activity.
- Have a **quiet space** for participants to go if they need to regulate themselves. Allow some quiet time before they re-engage in the session.
- Use **contrast equipment** when designing areas. For example, do not use green cones when delivering activities on grass.
- **Colour code cones** (that is, use the same colour) when designing specific areas of play. This will provide a reference point of where to move to or stand.
- **Set up multiple stations** to replicate activities and reduce waiting time. Where possible, have one adult at each station.
- Ensure there is **enough space** between participants so they can move freely without hitting another participant.