

Supporting Wheelchair Users during Physical Activity

Delivering the Session

If there is one thing to take away from this guidance, it is to focus on what the participant can do; never assume that they will be unable to do something. Where possible, demonstrate the desired skill in a wheelchair yourself - it will show participants the correct technique and will give them confidence that the skill is achievable.

Duty of care

- Be aware and minimise risk of common injuries from propelling the wheelchair, such as blisters, friction burn from tyres, or trapping fingers in the spokes
- Ensure participants take in plenty of fluid during sessions
- Discuss realistic expectations with the player around what they would like to achieve
- Avoid touching a participant's wheelchair as they consider it to be part of them
- If the participant has a personal assistant, be sure to speak directly to the participant rather than communicating through their assistant

Terminology

Be aware of current socially accepted terminology:

Do use

- Disabled person
- Non-disabled
- Wheelchair user or person who uses a wheelchair
- Impairments
- For wheelchair users
- Accessible toilet
- Orange/blue badge holder parking
- Personal assistants

Do not use

- The disabled, handicapped
- Able bodied
- Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair
- Disabilities
- For wheelchairs
- Disabled toilet
- Disabled parking
- Carers

Sensation

- Be aware of hot and cold surfaces – some participants may have lack of sensation in their touch
- There is the potential for damage such as cuts and bruises below their lesion due to lack of sensation

Range of movement

- Check participants' range of movement. Some participants may not be able to raise their arms above their shoulders so try to use stretches that can be performed below this level. Some participants may have spinal rods; it is therefore important for the athlete to only stretch as far as they feel comfortable
- There is a common assumption that if a participant is in a wheelchair they cannot bear weight on their legs, however, some may be able to bear weight, depending on their impairment



Fatigue and temperature regulation

WheelPower

British Wheelchair Sport

Registered Charity No. 265498

Transforming lives through sport

- Participants may tire easily during a session due to a lack of motor skill efficiency
- Participants may struggle with temperature regulation – both hot and cold. A tetraplegic (quadriplegic), for example, may not be able to perspire and will, therefore, require water to be sprayed on them to avoid overheating

Warm up and cool down

- As with all activity, it is recommended that participants warm up before, and cool down and after a session
- As participants will mainly be using their arms, focus the warm up and cool down on these muscles groups
- Do not forget the core muscles, as the level of a participant's functional ability will depend on their impairment

Surface

- Where possible, use a playing surface that is suitable for a wheelchair user
- Adjust the height of the anti-tip caster (wheel) on different surfaces

Targets

- Only decrease the distance to targets if this is necessary – do not automatically assume that wheelchair users will need targets to be closer

Zones

- Introduce different zones within the activity area for non-disabled participants to safely participate alongside participants using a wheelchair (see sessions plans for further details)

Equipment

- Participants may find a smaller racket grip easier to use because of the need to place the racket handle on the wheel for propulsion
- Use sport specific specialist equipment, where available, such as a wheelchair football attachment

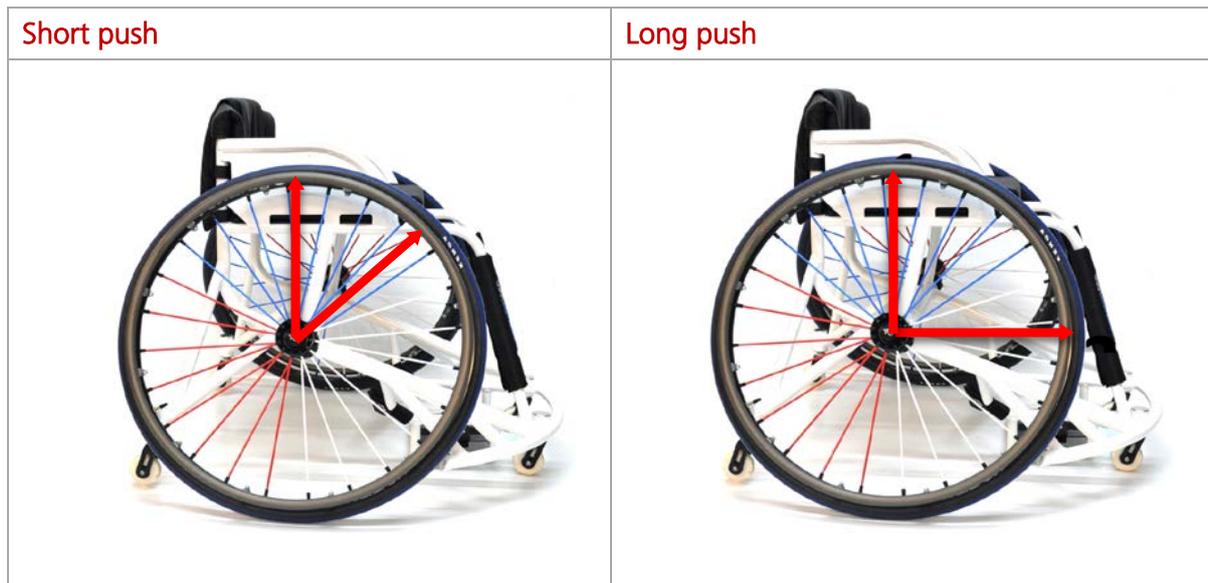
Rules

- Recognise rule changes; for example, in:
 - Tennis: allow two bounces of the ball. Also allowing the non-disabled player two bounces will give the wheelchair user more time to recover
 - Basketball: allow two touches of the wheels before having to bounce or pass the ball
 - Table tennis: ensure the other player plays seated
- Further rules can be found on each sport's National Governing Body website

Pushing technique

There are two main types of pushing techniques; short and long.

- Short pushes are mainly used for adjusting position
- Long pushes are mainly used for momentum
- The pushing action consists of a continual oval movement. The images below highlight the distance of short (12-2) and long push (12-3) on the wheel rim using a clock face
- Participants can push forward on one wheel and backward on the other wheel, to rotate the wheelchair quickly



Coaching qualifications and exit routes

The following organisations provide a variety of inclusive coaching courses aimed at equipping coaches with the skills to support disabled people to be and stay active:

- UK Coaching: ukcoaching.org
- Activity Alliance: activityalliance.org.uk
- National Governing Bodies: sportengland.org

National Governing Bodies (NGBs) also provide sport specific coaching resources for coaches who specialise in a specific sport – such resources will be available from the NGB's website. In addition to resources and coaching courses, NGBs will direct participants to relevant disability sessions within their location.