

Fitness for Kids with Disabilities and Special Needs

For parents of children with special needs, finding appropriate physical activities can be challenging. Playgrounds are often surfaced with material like wood chips, which make them inaccessible to crutches, walkers, and wheelchairs. But many communities are

becoming aware of the need for inclusive recreation options for children with

limited mobility, and are introducing adapted sports programs. Look for facilities that employ adaptive recreation professionals to provide assistance to you and your child. Sports that have been adapted for players in wheelchairs include basketball, softball, and tennis. The Central Florida Dreamplex is an organization that offers these and other activities for those with disabilities.

Children with developmental disabilities tend to be less fit than kids without such disabilities. Parents should encourage special-needs kids to participate in whatever activities they

find fun that are within their range of abilities. A child with autism and communication impairments might struggle with verbal instructions from coaches during certain team sports and benefit more from participation in individual sporting activities. Be sure to discuss your child's special needs with his or her coach.

Physical activity for children with special needs doesn't have to be an organized sport. Walking and biking are good options for cardiovascular workouts, and three-wheeled bikes are available for those who have difficulty balancing. Kids may also enjoy dancing along to exercise videos.

Many camps and programs are designed to help children who have specific limitations,

such as visual impairment, developmental disabilities, or spinal cord injuries. Horseback riding, scuba diving, and canoeing are just a few of the recreation options for children with either physical or developmental disabilities. Numerous organizations have been developed for athletic participation by persons with disabilities. The best known may be Special Olympics (specialolympicsflorida.org), but the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability has compiled a list of 304 programs in Florida. You can search this list by city at www.nchpad.org/Directories/Programs/USA/Florida. Consult with your child's doctor to ensure the program you choose is appropriate for your child. 



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