

This TelAbility handout describes the benefits of participation in community recreation activities and lists resources to help you get started.

Community Recreation

Participation in community recreation by children with disabilities can have tremendous benefits on both physical and psychosocial outcomes. Positive attitudes toward children with disabilities and friendships among individuals with diverse abilities develop when recreation and leisure are pursued within community settings. Early involvement in some form of physical recreation or social activity available in the community is an important step toward enhancing the quality of life for children with disabilities throughout every stage of their development.

Life Long Activity

The choice of recreational activity may change during early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and adult stages of development. Movement abilities, motivation, level of performance, and participation will all vary depending upon the child's age and stage of development, the characteristics of each child, and community opportunities.

Benefits

The specific benefits of moderate, regular, challenging physical activity include:

- development of major body systems
- improvements in cardiovascular function
- increased strength
- increased flexibility
- improved balance
- improved mental health
- promotion of social interaction
- emotional growth

Research is available on a few specific types of community recreation for children with disabilities. We describe the benefits documented by research for three examples yoga, martial arts, and dance.

Yoga

Yoga has been associated with a wide range of benefits. A small but remarkable body of evidence documents improvement in typical children and adolescents who practice yoga. These include improvements in:

- spatial memory,
- static motor activities,
- body satisfaction
- heart rate

Children with disabilities including mental retardation, asthma, and epilepsy have shown improvements in one or more of the following:

- intellectual function
- social adaptation
- pulmonary function
- seizure control

Enhancing the lives of children with disabilities

Martial Arts

Participation in various forms of martial arts have shown positive benefits for participants. The literature documents physical, mental, and emotional benefits of martial arts, such as improvements in

- strength
- balance
- concentration
- self-confidence
- psychosocial development

Specific studies with individuals with disabilities including visual impairments, cerebral palsy, and head injury show improvements in:

- balance
- body awareness
- range of motion
- coordination

Dance

Community dance programs are also a beneficial recreational opportunity for children. Benefits have been shown in :

- physical fitness
- flexibility
- strength
- self-confidence

The literature relating specifically to participation of children with disabilities including mental retardation and hearing impairments has described improvements in

- balance
- socialization
- ability to sequence dance steps
- creative thinking skills

Healthy People 2010

Healthy People 2010, a national plan for improving the health of all Americans, has emphasized the importance of individual participation in recreation and leisure activities (US, DHHS, 2000). This plan is focused on efforts to promote health and wellness activities in communities across the United States. Healthy People 2010 cites objectives that are based upon principles of:

- equal access to community-based opportunities and
- the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle for all individuals, regardless of individualized circumstances

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Additional Resources

There are a number of websites and publications that can assist families in locating sites, asking appropriate questions, and locating adapted equipment if necessary for participation. Take a look at these sites, and choose an activity that is motivating, accessible, adaptable, and accommodating---the end result will be a new adventure for all!

Selected Resources

Note: Resources identified are provided as examples only and are not endorsed by authors or the institutional sponsors.

Websites

American Dance Therapy Association <http://www.adta.org>

American Tae Kwon Do Association www.atakorea.com

Axis Dance Company <http://www.axisdance.org/frame2.html>

Full Radius Dance Company <http://www.fullradiusdance.org/>

Gallaudet Dance Company <http://depts.gallaudet.edu/dance/>

International Disabled Self Defense Association www.defenseability.com

Judo for the visually impaired www.judoinfo.com/blind.htm

Karate International www.karateinternational.net

U.S. Handicapped Square Dance <http://frontpage.zebra.net/deanemery/ush.html>

Yoga for the Special Child www.specialyoga.com

Yogakids www.yogakids.com

Hunter K, et al. 2003. Yoga: Community Recreation Activity Profiles. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In press and to be website posted at www.cdl.unc.edu/links/allaboutrecreation.

Hunter K, et al., 2003. Dance: Community Recreation Activity Profiles. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In press and to be website posted at www.cdl.unc.edu/links/allaboutrecreation.

Books

Fontana D. *Teaching Meditation to Children*. 1997. Element Books.

Hill, Kathleen. *Dance for Physically Disabled Persons: A Manual for Teaching Ballroom, Square, and Folk Dances to Users of Wheelchairs and Crutches*. 1976. Physical Education and Recreation for the Handicapped

Luby T. *Children's Book of Yoga: Games & Exercises Mimic Plants & Animals & Objects*. 1998. Clear Light Publishers.

Stewart M, Phillips K. *Yoga for Children*. 1992. Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Stinson, Sue. *Dance for Young Children: Finding the Magic in Movement*. 1988. The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance

Sumar S. Translator: Jeffrey Volk, Adriana Marusso. *Yoga for the Special Child: A Therapeutic Approach for Infants and Children with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Learning Disabilities*. 1998. Special Yoga.

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