

Teaching Athletics to Children with ADHD

A chat with Matthew Lucas, EdD

MATTHEW LUCAS, EdD, is a professor of physical and health education at Longwood University. He has published articles on participation of children with disabilities in athletics in *Strategies*, *Palaestra*, *Virginia Journal*, and *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals*. He operates a Dixie Youth baseball team and bowling league for children with disabilities. Dr. Lucas has been instrumental in securing grant funds for various clubs for children with disabilities and has presented research findings at many national conferences.

Teaching sports to children who have ADHD can be challenging. Based on your work with children who have various disabilities, what tips can you share?

● **Give clear, concise directions.** Children with ADHD often have difficulty paying attention to details, remembering things and following directions. When you are teaching your child a new game, try to maintain eye contact to hold his or her attention, and give clear, concise directions with as few details as possible.

Get down to your child's eye level and start slowly. Start a basic game of catch, and after a few times, say "after catching the ball, run to the base." After doing that a few times, instruct him to catch the ball, run to the base and back. Then, add giving you a high-five after he runs back from the base.

● **When in doubt, simplify.** Trying to explain the complex rules of baseball to a child who has difficulty paying attention can easily lead to frustration and giving up. So simplify. Instead of teaching her the whole game, break it down. Make a game out of running the base paths or having a catch.

Sports are a basically a bunch of little activities done together. Done separately, these activities can be fun if you make them fun. Playing a game of "horse" instead of a five-on-five basketball game can be an uncomplicated way to get your child moving and introduce him or her to organized athletics.

● **Encourage them immediately.** As any parent of a child with ADHD knows, they often get bored—and frustrated—easily. A toy or object that was the object of fascination mere minutes ago will frequently be discarded and forgotten. Worse yet, they may get angry if things don't go their way. Parents who point out the positives can help their kids focus on what's fun about the game.

Praise, praise, praise! Before you go outside with your child to play, tell yourself that you are going to consistently tell your child "great job!" Part of that is learning to roll with the punches: If he does something the wrong way, make it the game. If she gets frustrated, try something different. Staying positive not only keeps them interested, it keeps them outside.



● **Be consistent.** Mixed signals are often difficult for children with ADHD to understand. They need to know what's expected and how to play the game right, or they will get confused and frustrated.

Be sensitive to the fact that you know how to play the game and they don't. If you're teaching an organized sport, start by teaching the fundamentals and sticking to the basic rules. This is important because when they join a team, they are going to be expected to play correctly. If they already know the boundaries, they'll be more likely to have fun! 🗣️

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