

Theme 2: Para sports

Unit 5: Let's play the Para athletics (for those with vision impairments)

Learning objective:

To become aware of different Para sports and adaptations

Introduction

Para athletics, in the form of field events for wheelchair users, appeared in the first Paralympic Games in 1960. The titles in these events were competed for by athletes with spinal injuries. The sport now includes a wide range of track and field events for both male and female athletes, with a variety of athletic impairments being taken into consideration. Athletes compete in specifically designed wheelchairs or use a range of prosthetics and assistive devices. In track and field events, those who have vision impairment may be assisted by sighted guides.

Athletic events contested at the Paralympic Games include:

- Track events: sprint race, middle-distance race, long-distance race and relay race
- Road events: marathon
- Field events: high jump, long jump, triple jump, discus, shot put, javelin
- Combined events: pentathlon

The aim of this unit is to experience what it is like to be a guide-runner for track events and running with an eyeshade. Initially, activities should be undertaken at walking/jogging pace. Guide-runners should lead their partners by the elbow, shoulder or wrist, or try using verbal commands to guide them as they walk/jog. Emphasise the need to guide, not pull or push.



Only when students are confident with their guide-runner should they increase their speed and run together, side by side, along straight tracks. Students should act as both guide-runner and athlete. Further information can be found in the Overview of Para sports, on the IPC website: www.paralympic.org/news/para-athletics-explained-guide-running or in the short video about athlete Darwin Castro: youtu.be/_HRZ5E05qGo

Activities 1a and b are the main activities for **younger** and **older** students who are new to guide running and running with an eyeshade. These activities can also be used as practice activities for more experienced learners before moving on to their main activity; Activity 2.

Think safety at all times.



Activity 1a

Let's get started learning these skills:

guiding athletes with visual impairments; experience running with an eye mask.

Equipment

Space for walking and running; eyeshades or blindfolds (or something to cover the eyes); cones or similar to make obstacle courses; light objects that can be picked up - bean bags, rubber rings etc.

Skills practice

- Begin with a teacher-led activity. Provide everyone with eyeshades or ask participants to keep their eyes tightly closed. Ask participants to carry out simple actions in response to your commands. For example, they can touch different body parts; balance on one leg and then the other; jump up and down, on the spot, in a short continuous sequence; hop, on the spot, on one leg and then the other; sit down, lie down, stand up, turn around; jump, turn 90° or 180° and land.

The aim of the activities that follow is to introduce learners to guiding techniques and the sensation of walking with an eyeshade (or closed eyes). Make sure both partners get a chance to guide and be guided. It is important that guide-runners understand their responsibility to keep their partner safe at all times.

- In pairs, one students should act as the guide-runner, while the other, wearing an eyeshade, acts as the athlete. Ask learners to repeat some of the activities above. The guide-runner should provide clear verbal instructions and keep their partner safe.



- In pairs, each guide-runner should lead their partner by the elbow, shoulder or wrist in a straight line from one end of the playing area to the other. Participants should walk throughout this initial exercise.
- Set up a very simple obstacle course (e.g. place markers on the playing area) so that pairs have to change direction, pick up objects and return to where they started. The sighted guide should give verbal commands or sound signals to their partner. Participants should walk throughout this exercise as well.
- Set out a 10-metre-long straight course with a start line at one end and a finish line at the other. The learner wearing the eyeshade should begin on the start line and their guide-runner should stand on the finish line. The learner wearing the eyeshade must walk to the finish line. Their sighted guide-runner must use calling, clapping and other sounds to direct their partner to them.
- Athletes and their guide-runners should practise walking and jogging together over short distances, before attempting the following relay challenge. Guides should provide clear verbal instructions and gently support their partner by holding their elbow, shoulder or wrist. They must not pull their partner. Those learners wearing an eyeshade need to have confidence in their sighted guides before attempting any further challenges.



Activity 1b

Let's practise our skills
and get ready to play

Try out the skill-building exercises below to build the techniques needed for Para athletics.

Skills practice

In pairs; one learner acts as a guide-runner and the other acts as an athlete and wears an eyeshade.

- Set out a 15-metre-long straight course with a start line and markers to denote the turning point.
- Two pairs form a team.
- Participants run in their pairs: one acting as the guide-runner and the other acting as the athlete.
- The first pair begin on the start signal and run to the turning marker. At the turning point, the athlete must touch the cone or marker.
- As soon as they return to the start line, they must touch the second pair, who then have their go.
- While the second pair takes their turn, the first pair swaps positions, the athlete becoming the guide-runner and vice-versa. This continues until all four learners have run once as an athlete and once as a guide-runner. The time taken for all four athletes gives the total time for that team. Teams should repeat the relay race, trying to beat their original time.





Activity 2

Let's give it a go:

experience running as, and guiding, athletes with vision impairments.

See the Overview of Para sports for a brief introduction to Para athletics.

Playing area

A flat, smooth, open space for walking and running with no obstacles or hazards. Where possible, a running track should be used.

Equipment

- Eyeshades or blindfolds, or anything suitable for covering the eyes.
- Start and finish lines marked with chalk or tape.
- Cones or markers to denote turning points.
- Short tethers (made of a non-stretch material that can be held by both athlete and guide-runner).
- Light objects, such as small balls, bean bags or rings that can be thrown.

How to play

- Try running tethered, side-by-side over short, straight-line distances. The guide-runner should hold one end of the tether, and the athlete the other. Wear eyeshades only when the athlete is confident enough to do so.
- Increase the distance to 100m and 200m, as confidence improves.



- Set up simple relay races over 50 or 100 metre-long courses.
- Try throwing objects onto, or at, targets while wearing an eyeshade. Sighted guides should provide feedback about the accuracy of the throws.

Further information and films about Para athletics can be found on the IPC website: www.paralympic.org/athletics



Inclusion tips:

- (T) Use a buddy system.
- (R) Reduce the competitive element.
- (E) Reduce the running distance.
- (E) Minimise distractions in the surrounding area. These activities need a quiet environment so that partners can listen to and hear each other.
- (E) Permit students to close their eyes rather than using eyeshades.



Extension activity

Research the role of guide-runners and find out about the trust that is required between the athlete and the guide-runner. Apply this to your running activities.

With a guide-runner, take part in class competitions and tournaments designed for those with visual impairments, or challenge a local school to a competitive Para athletic track event. Also, set up and oversee activities for younger children with visual impairments.

Guide-runners who accompany Paralympic runners in 100m races need to be able to run the distance in 10.4-10.5 seconds. How long does it take you to run this distance?

Research the role of sighted guides in other Paralympic events, such as Para alpine skiing, cycling or the triathlon. What does it take to be a guide?

To extend students' understanding of Para athletics for people with a visual impairment, they could take the role of coach, timekeeper or starter, or act as a guide to an athlete with a visual impairment. A guide to the rules of Para athletics, including acting as a guide-runner, can be found in the official World Para Athletics rules and regulations manual: www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/180112123931374_World+Para+Athletics+Rules+and+Regulations+2018-2019+-+January+2018.pdf

Optional independent research

Research the Para athletes who represent your country in Para athletics. In what events do they compete? Use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other social media apps and websites to show your support for them.

Discussion/reflection questions

- How did you feel engaging in guided running?
- Did you trust your guide, and why was this so important?
- Why is a silent environment important? How did noise affect your concentration through the activities?
- What could you do to make it easier for a student with a visual impairment to navigate your school buildings and grounds?

Homework task

- In what other Para sports do athletes with vision impairment compete? Find out about Para athletes who compete in these events for your country. What are some of their achievements?