



## **Briefing document for coaches involved in the Enjoy Tennis programme**

We are hoping the below documents will give you a little insight into some terminology and also communication with a person with a disability, which we hope will give some confidence in getting involved in coaching within the Enjoy Tennis programme.

### **Terminology**

The purpose of this document is to give you some very basic background to the terminology used in relation to disability and also to give a guide to acceptable and respectful disability language. This language has changed over time and there are many different models of disability language, but currently in Ireland, we mostly talk about disability using people-first language (person with a disability), but you will also come across social model language also (disabled person)

#### **Person with a disability v's disabled person, people-first language v social model.**

People-first language is where a person is put before the diagnosis/disability- person with a disability, it describes what a person has, not what a person is- person with a disability, person with a visual impairment/ hearing impairment, person with autism.

Disabled person is less used in Ireland, because it can be deemed that the disability is seen ahead of the person, but the reasoning behind this use of language through the Social Model of disability is that the person is disabled by the environment around them and the way society is- society is what is disabling them with the physical environment around us not being accessible, negative attitudes, lack of access to resources and other barriers created by society. The social model focusses on lifting these barriers to help **enable** the person experiencing them.

It is suggested to avoid words with negative connotations. For example:



Avoid 'confined to a wheelchair/ wheelchair bound'- preferred 'wheelchair user, uses a wheelchair'.

Also, using words like overcome and inspiring can be really patronising to a person with a disability, just treat them/ talk to them like you would any other player.

Avoid use of the word 'normal' to describe someone without a disability, it implies that the person with a disability isn't 'normal', maybe refer to them as a person without a disability, it is descriptive but not negative.

Don't worry if you use a regular phrase like 'see you later' to a person with a visual impairment, or 'did you hear about ...' to someone with a hearing impairment, most people will understand that it's just everyday language and not directed at their disability. As long as the language you use is not intended to be hurtful/insulting, most people will be ok with the language used. Listen to their needs, don't make assumptions. Remember, **you're coaching the person, not the label.**



## **Communication with a person with a disability**

### **General tips**

- Use age appropriate tone and content when talking to the person, no-one appreciates being spoken to in a patronising manner, so don't talk to the player like they are a child if they are an adult.
- Always speak to the person themselves and not their parent/carer etc. If you do need to speak to the parent/carer, don't talk about the person like they're not there.
- Don't assume they want you to do something for them, they will ask if they need help, or ask them if there's any way you can help them and wait for the offer to be accepted/rejected
- Don't be afraid to ask the players themselves what they need/want/think. They might have ways you can adapt a skill/drill to suit their needs that you might not have thought of.
- No need to shout, like we often do when talking to a person from a foreign country, slow down your speech and use more basic terms if needed or try to explain something giving a visual, give a demonstration if it helps the person understand the drill etc.
- Be patient, flexible and supportive. Take time to understand the player and give them time to understand you
- If someone appears to be overwhelmed by a situation, try to keep them calm, maybe move them to a quieter place and give them time to settle themselves, ask if you can help in any way.
- Don't be afraid to think outside the box- adapt your sessions to suit the needs of the players, eg use balloons or bean bags if they are more appropriate than a tennis ball initially, keep score using numbers 1-5 etc
- Remember no two people are the same, speak to the person themselves to get an idea of their abilities and capabilities and what they hope to gain from playing tennis. Some ice-breaker games at the start of a session will help you discover their general abilities regarding movement and mobility, hand-eye co-ordination etc and help you plan the sessions around that.



### Person with a visual impairment

- Identify yourself when approaching someone with a visual impairment, introduce anyone that's with you or let them introduce themselves. Also, let them know when you're leaving.
- Use their name when directing a question to them and look at them- your voice will travel better than if you turn your back and also show them the courtesy of looking at them as you would with a player who doesn't have a visual impairment.
- Be conscious of the noise levels, they might be relying more on your voice so need to be able to hear you without excess noise around them.
- Don't be afraid to ask them how much/what they can see, not many people have no vision at all, they might have peripheral vision, or see shadows etc- if you stand at a particular angle or distance away it might help them see you better eg if they have some peripheral vision they might prefer you to stand a bit to the left or right. Be guided by them and ask where they would prefer you to stand when explaining a skill/drill etc
- On court, give more specific directions, eg move 3 small steps to your left, the net is 4m in front of you etc. If necessary, tell them about the physical layout of the environment around them, eg the fence/wall is 4m being the drop down lines, the light poles are 2m outside each net post etc, let them know if there are any dips/drops/steps around.
- Ask if they need help when moving around the court and let them take your arm/elbow, walk beside but slightly in front of them (so they feel changes in direction) and give them verbal prompts as you move, especially relating to steps/drops/openings like doors. Let them dictate a pace they are comfortable with moving.
- Never rub or distract their dog, if they have one, while they are working or unless you have been given permission to, this dog acts as the person's eyes and needs to be able to focus on their job.



### Person with a hearing impairment

- To get their attention tap them gently on the shoulder or get into a position where they will see you and wave their direction.
- Where and how you stand is going to be very important for the person, if they lip-read, they will need to be able to see your face, with good light not shadows. A suggestion is not to have the sun behind you because this will cause shadows on your face.
- Speak clearly, face the person and keep your hands etc away from your mouth to allow them to lip read if necessary.
- Be aware of your surroundings, keep external noise to a minimum, especially when explaining something. If the courts are near a road, consider moving to the furthest place from the noise of traffic when explaining drills so everyone can hear as easily as possible.
- Don't be afraid to use a pen/paper if you don't understand each other
- Give a visual demonstration of a skill/drill where possible, so that if they can't hear you, they will understand better from watching

### Wheelchair user

- A persons wheelchair is regarded to be within their personal space and not many of us like our space to be crowded, so try not to encroach on their personal space by getting too close. Don't touch or lean on their chair and ask if they need help, don't just decide to move them by pushing their wheelchair unless asked.
- Try to facilitate eye contact where possible, don't stand too close so the player has to look up at an awkward angle all the time and also to respect their personal space.
- On a tennis court make sure it is fully accessible and that equipment isn't blocking the entrances or areas they will need to move around.
- A persons chair skills (how adept they are at moving the wheelchair themselves) will make a difference to their ability to play tennis, sometimes



it is worth spending time practising turning around cones with a racket in hand before introducing a ball to help improve their chair skills. Give them more time at the start to get used to the new skills. Starting with a red ball will help give more time.

### Person who has dementia

Dementia is a disease that causes damage to the brain, resulting in memory loss, problems with use of language and can affect someone's ability to carry out everyday tasks.

- It can also affect balance, their ability to communicate effectively and it can change their perceptions- eg something in blue they might associate with being water- if there's a blue court they might be reluctant to stand on it.
- Loud noises can cause distractions, try to be on court in quieter times and keep external noise to a minimum.
- People who have dementia can struggle to find the right word, give them time and don't be tempted to finish a sentence for them.
- They can get agitated around certain times, linking the time of day with something they might have done in the past eg around school finishing time they might need to think they need to collect the children. Be conscious of the time you choose for sessions.
- Activities can become more difficult as the disease progresses, they might have to stop playing, but it's important to know they can also improve their skills, so it's not all negative.
- They will have good and bad days/weeks, so it's important to adapt the session if they are having a bad day, allow more breaks, maybe shorten the game to only playing in the service box, to allow re-focus.
- It might be necessary to remind them of the need for appropriate footwear and comfortable clothes. Also a reminder to bring water might be necessary.



Some suggestions that might help:

- Advise is initially to have 1-1 ratio of player-volunteer/staff, can be altered if it's going well.
- Signposting in and around the club eg use their service providers logo or colours (something familiar) with arrows directing them where to go.
- Use visual prompts such as arrows or coloured dots to tell them where to stand.
- Have chairs and benches around the court to allow them sit down for breaks
- Have coaches and volunteers names on their shirts, large writing so easily seen
- Start with a yellow ball, keep balls low and in front of the player where possible initially so there are less risks of losing balance moving backwards.
- Ask the players themselves how you can help them.

### Person with autism/ASD

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the umbrella term for the spectrum of autism. Because it is a spectrum, people will experience things in different ways and to varying degrees, but most people who have autism will have difficulties with social interaction, language or communication, repetitive behaviours and sensory processing.

- The language you use will be very important, a lot of people with autism don't understand sarcasm and might misinterpret idioms and common phrases, and might take things very literally, eg if you say 'it's raining cats and dogs' they will expect to see cats and dogs falling from the sky. If this is the case, keep your language basic and direct.



- Sometimes a person with autism may have difficulty with social interactions- they may not make eye contact and might struggle to make friends with peers. If eye contact is an issue for them, maybe try to do more visual demonstrations where they are more comfortable with watching what you are doing. Try to keep them in groups where they are relaxed with the people around them and introduce anyone new who comes into the group.
- A person with autism may express themselves through challenging behaviour, especially if in a situation where they don't feel comfortable, or if their routine has changed. Try to keep the routine the same, or if there is going to be a change eg different coach one day, give warning where possible. These might be the people you think are being 'bold' but if they have autism, there is generally a 'trigger' to these behaviours, be conscious of their triggers, try to find out if they have coping strategies and work out some strategies suitable to the situation. If they become visibly overwhelmed, offer them somewhere quiet (with supervision close-by) for them to have some quiet time to calm themselves.
- They may also display repetitive behaviours, whether it's a word being repeated or 'fidgeting' or 'stimming' (a repeating of a word or action, like spinning, hand flapping etc). It might be beneficial for the person to hold a stress ball or foam tennis ball to help them focus.

### Person with Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a lifelong , non-progressive condition caused by damage to the brain before, during or after birth. It can cause poor coordination, weak and stiff muscles, balance problems. Some people will experience issues with swallow, speech and language, epilepsy or hearing and visual impairments. CP can vary from mild to severe and will affect each person in a different way, so it's important to get to know each individual, to learn their abilities.





- Because people with CP can experience problems with muscle weakness and tone, a good idea would be to have a well prepared warm-up session that covers all muscle groups to help them warm up well before starting. Also, shorter drills/skills with recovery time in between is suggested if necessary.
- Problems with circulation might mean that outdoor temperatures might restrict their ability to get involved during the colder times. If they are staying involved a warm-up will be crucial, and activities to keep them warm throughout.
- Be aware of their balance issues, if they are more pronounced if they are tired, have benches/seats to allow them to sit if necessary. In drills, if they have balance issues, try not to make them move backwards quickly or dramatically from side to side to lessen the likelihood of falling, but at the same time, make sure to challenge them and not have things too sedate and boring.

#### Person with an intellectual disability

- When talking to a person with an intellectual disability (ID), keep any explanations brief and use simple language. Don't give too many directions at one time, which may lead to confusion. Once you have explained something, make sure the person has understood, if they don't, don't just repeat what you said, try to explain using different words and demonstrate to help them understand
- Use a tone and manner that is appropriate to the age of the person you're talking to, just because you are using basic language with an adult doesn't mean you need to talk to them like a child, but keep things short and simple.
- If you don't understand what a person has said, ask them again, don't just guess, it's more embarrassing for both of you if you get it wrong.



- Be prepared to adapt your coaching session, use a lighter ball or balloons, smaller court etc if necessary.
- Be patient, sometimes it might take the person a little longer to process what you are saying to them, or for them to formulate their question/response, don't attempt to guess what they are saying, give them the opportunity to say it themselves. It might also take them a little longer to process the information you have given them, so don't move on to the next drill too quickly.
- Use all the communication tools at your disposal- gestures and visual demonstrations might help you get your explanation across

### Non-verbal communicators

Sometimes a person with a disability won't communicate using speech, but might use other tools, such as symbols, sign language, gestures and computers for example. Learn to read their body language and try to relax your own body language- this will become easier the more you get to know the player.

- Begin and end a conversation/session like you do with anyone, eg say hi and bye/ wave to greet and say bye
- If you don't understand someone, don't just give up, ask them to repeat themselves and don't be afraid to try other ways of communicating eg gestures, take out a mobile phone and offer to write text if they can, use gestures and actions
- A smile is a universal means of communication, it will help relax everyone and might help get the conversation started.

Adapted from Tennis Australia and CARA factsheets and UK coaching

Updated May 2020

