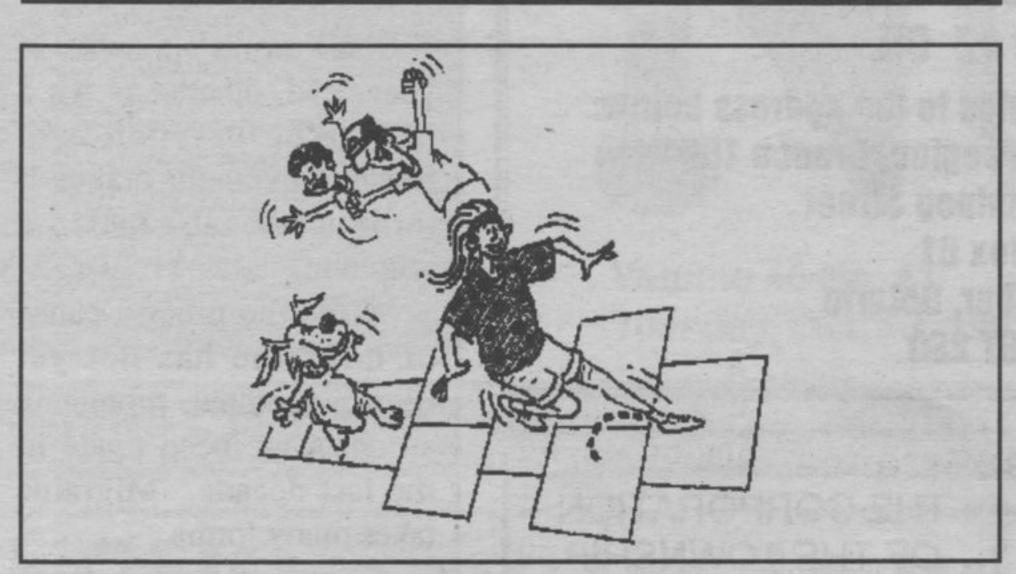


# LIFESTYLE TIPS

**Active Living is for Everybody** 



This article is provided by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute in collaboration with ParticipACTION.

Active living has something for everyone. Children and young people with a mental handicap, in particular, stand to benefit from a healthy, active lifestyle.

While there is no "prescribed" set of activities for them, research supported by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute shows that children with a mental handicap prefer activities that require little equipment and no special facilities. They also tend to favour activities that can be done individually or in small groups. Walking, swimming, bicycling, jogging, and ice skating are especially popular.

Parents, neighbours, caregivers, and friends of individuals with a mental handicap can introduce them informally to a variety of physical activities. A simple course of action will make the experience more rewarding. Project LIFE (Leisure Is For Everyone) offers the following suggestions:

- · Do not underestimate the person's abilities or interests.
- · Break down directions into simple steps that can be learned in order.
- Repeat directions as required; demonstrate whenever possible.
- Offer specific suggestions for improvement.
- Give positive feedback—praise when it is deserved!
- Be patient. Modify and adapt activities whenever necessary.
- · Respect their dignity at all times.

There is also a place for formal group activities, and most communities have a variety of programs from which to choose. They range from segregated to totally integrated, with an increasing trend to integration.

Although Dr. Jane Watkinson (University of Alberta) supports the trend, she recommends that we proceed cautiously with integration in physical activity programs. As a specialist in the area of physical activity for children and youth with a mental handicap, Dr. Watkinson has sensible advice for parents facing this challenge. She suggests the following approach:

Go for performance. A major goal of integration should be to improve motor performance and active participation. Increasing social participation, social acceptance, and self-esteem will be . natural (and important) parts of the process.

Be selective. Choose programs that encourage the full, active involvement of all participants.

Look for appropriate programs in your community. If they don't seem to be available, it could be that they're not widely advertised. If opportunity really is lacking, voice your concerns to recreation officials and representatives on your local school board.



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