

Cerebral palsy (CP) - Support card

No two people experience Cerebral Palsy the same way, it can affect different parts of the body and people can experience difficulties with breathing, movement, posture, balance and pain. Get to know the person to understand their motivations, how the condition affects them and what support they might need.

What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral Palsy is a lifelong condition arising from damage to the motor areas of the brain that can occur before or during birth, or later on in life through a traumatic head injury, stroke or similar condition.

Football pathways

CP players can play mainstream, pan-disability, CP-specific, frame and powerchair football. CP specific football is played by ambulant players – meaning they can move unaided, frame football is played by players who use a frame or walker, powerchair football is played by players who use powered wheelchairs or have limited movement in a manual wheelchair.

General characteristics

- Some people with CP may have difficulty in coordinating and integrating basic movement patterns – they may be prone to accidents and injuries because they have difficulty with balance and coordination.
- Some people with CP may have more frequent dehydration, muscle cramps and exhaustion.
- Some people with CP may be more likely to have epilepsy than their non-disabled peers. It's important to establish how they manage their seizures and what procedures you should follow.
- Some people with CP may have a speech impairment. You should not automatically assume the player has a learning disability.
- Short term memory loss alongside hearing and visual impairments can also be associated conditions.
- Participants may have a slower reaction time when moving on command. The participant may have limb movement restrictions.
- If experiencing pain or discomfort, players should consult their doctor or physio before taking part in physical activity.

Coaching considerations

- Get to know the player – talk to the player and their parents or carers about how you can best support the player.
- Players may tire more quickly and so need shorter work intervals with longer rests. Also consider the format of the game and how this may affect fatigue levels. Small sided-games and Futsal are beneficial.
- Consider temperature – being too hot or too cold can have an impact on ability to make movements and perform tasks. The cold can cause muscles to seize up, warmth can lead to overheating and fatigue.
- Be patient with players processing information – there may be additional neurological conditions.
- Don't be afraid of continual repetition and reinforcement as this can help reduce coordination challenges.
- Be aware that the player may have a strong side or a preferred position due to their impairment – work around this and help find solutions on the pitch.
- Find the balance between the comfort zone and a challenge for the player – development may not be obvious at first, so establish with the player if and how they like to be challenged.
- As a coach you may need to establish boundaries regarding responsibilities – for example, the player's personal needs and how to assist during a coaching session if required.



Don't forget the golden nugget – Make sure your environment is always a safe and welcoming place to be!

How do I use STEP to adapt my session to include CP players?



Space – Adjust the pitch size to allow players time to adjust body position whilst also considering fatigue levels of players within the session.



Task – Use short duration activities with regular breaks to manage fatigue. Allow time for players to process instructions.



Equipment – Use easy grasp balls for throwing and catching warm up games. Make players aware that there are now football boots specifically tailored for CP players available on the market.



Players – Group players according to physical literacy to ensure enjoyment of the session.

Step top tip:

Remember: STEP is a tool to help you coach, NOT a list of things you have to do. In order to use STEP effectively, it's essential you get to know your players so you can use the right modification at the right time to aid their development.

Additional resources

- [England Football Website: Disability Section](#)
- [Disability Football Introduction Course](#)
- [CP Sport Website](#)
- [UK Coaching: Coaching People Cerebral Palsy Guidance](#)