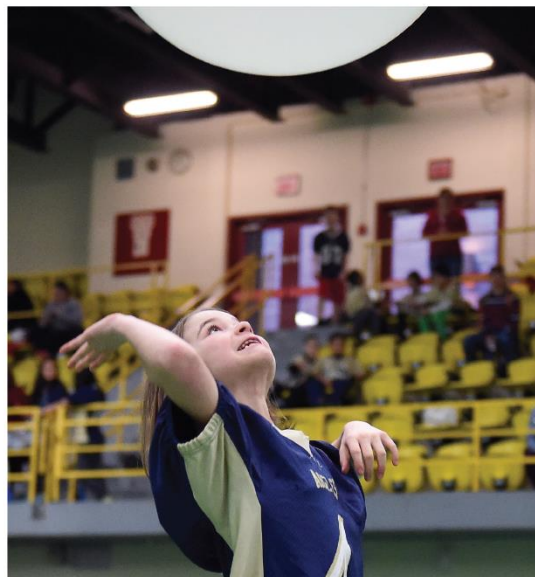




Be Your Best: The Challenge of healthy lifestyles for young with a disability



Guide facilitating interventions in sport and physical activity among young people with a

LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT

2013 Edition

Translated 2016

PRODUCED BY

UQTR



Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières



AN INITIATIVE OF



MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF



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THE LOGO OF THE 'LABORATOIRE EN LOISIR ET VIE COMMUNAUTAIRE'

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THE PHOTOS ON THE FRONT PAGE SHOW FOUR YOUNG PEOPLE GIVING EACH OTHER HIGH FIVE AFTER A HOCKEY GAME, A YOUNG GIRL PLAYING WITH A BIG WHITE BALL AND YOUNG PEOPLE PLAYING BASKETBALL.

THE PICTURES PRESENTED IN THIS GUIDE WERE TAKEN AS PART OF THE DÉFI SPORTIF ALTERGO . THEY DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE DISABILITY OR THE DISORDER WHICH IS THE SUBJECT OF THIS GUIDE

THANKS TO JEAN-BAPTISTE BENAVENT, FRANÇOIS LACASSE AND ALAIN RAKOTOMANANA FOR THE PICTURES PRESENTED ON THE FRONT PAGE AND THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	5
1. SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WITH A LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT	6
1.1 Characteristics of young people with language impairments	6
2. BENEFITS OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	9
2.1. Physical	10
2.2. Psychological.....	10
2.3. Cognitive.....	10
2.4. Social.....	10
3. CONSTRAINTS TO PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.....	11
3.1 Relating to young people with language impairments.....	12
3.2 Relating to the physical and social environment.....	15
3.3 Means to reduce constraints.....	19
4. PROGRAMS AND TOOLS AVAILABLE	20
4.1 Books.....	20
5. KEY POINTS TO SUPPORT PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.....	22
REFERENCES	24

List of tables

Table 1: Communication difficulties	7
Table 2: Benefits of sport and physical activity	9
Table 3: Summary of disorders that may be associated with language impairment and that may affect sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments	14
Table 4: Summary of constraints relating to the physical and social environment that affect sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments	17
Table 5: Communication strategies.....	18
Table 6: Means to reduce constraints.....	19
Table 7: Associations and tools that support sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments	21

INTRODUCTION

There are many benefits to sport and physical activity ¹. However, young people with functional limitations may be restricted in their participation in sport and physical activity ². This includes young people with language impairments³⁻⁵.

According to the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) by Statistics Canada, young people between the ages of 5 and 14 with a language or speech impairment account for 44.8% of all young people with disabilities ⁶. The percentage of young people with a language or speech impairment compared to the rest of Canada was 16% in 2001 and 19% in 2006. In 2012, the “Be Your Best: Adopt an active lifestyle and healthy eating habits” research project presented an overview of the situation of these young people in schools throughout Québec using telephone surveys. It showed that young people with language impairments represent 28% of young people in schools ⁷.

The PALS showed that half (50.2%) of young people with a speech or language impairment are limited in their participation in physical education and 58.2% in activities with others ⁸. It is therefore relevant to illustrate the effects of sport and physical activity, the different constraints that young people may face during these activities, and the means to overcome these constraints.

This guide — developed using a review of the literature as well as interviews with young people, parents and professionals — aims to support professionals who work with young people with language impairments. A total of 11 interviews were conducted with 3 young people, 3 parents, 4 professionals and an occupational therapist. These interviews support the scientific literature and provide ideas and means to overcome the limitations these young people face when participating in sport and physical activity.

1. SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WITH A LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT

Before demonstrating the importance and various benefits of sport and physical activity, we must establish the characteristics of young people with language impairments.

1.1 Characteristics of young people with language impairments

Firstly, language can be divided into two components: receptive language and expressive language⁹. Receptive language is the ability to understand what is heard while expressive language is the ability to produce sounds, word and phrases as well as to put thoughts into words and to use language to communicate with others¹⁰. Young people with language impairments can face limitations on an expressive or receptive level⁹. It is important to note that primary language impairments are not due to hearing impairments, sensory impairments, intellectual disabilities or a lack of stimulation¹¹. Young people with language impairments therefore have the same desire to communicate and generally have normal intelligence¹².

A distinction must also be made between a language delay and a language impairment. The language of a young person with a delay is comparable to the language of a younger child and it is possible to catch up before the age of five or six¹¹⁻¹³. A language impairment, on the other hand, persists through time and the young person will need regular follow-ups with a speech therapist and other professionals¹¹⁻¹³.

According to the *Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport* (2007), language impairments include dysphagia, severe mixed language disorder, and verbal dyspraxia. This guide addresses young people with language impairments in general without making a clear distinction between the various impairments. Needless to say, we must not forget that speech and language impairments are manifested differently in each young person, have varying degrees of severity, and evolve differently over time^{14, 15}.

The following table shows the communication difficulties of young people with language impairments. They are divided according to expressive and receptive language, although a young person can experience difficulties in both areas.

Table 1: Communication difficulties

Area affected	Difficulties	Examples
Expressive	Using gestures to communicate rather than words and phrases	
	Has difficulty choosing and organizing sounds to form a word	Says 'eripon' instead of 'eleven'
	Has difficulty choosing words to form a sentence	Confuses the words 'rabbit' and 'habit'
	Vocabulary is limited and imprecise	Overuses non-specific vocabulary such as 'thing' or 'this'
	Has difficulty telling a story or relating an event while following the sequence of events	
Receptive	Has difficulty understanding abstract or less common vocabulary	Does not understand more abstract terms such as emotions, qualities and faults, etc.
	Has difficulty understanding and distinguishing 'question words'	Does not understand the difference between the words 'where', 'how many', 'when', 'why'
	Has difficulty answering questions	Answers 'Jack' to the question 'How old are you?'
	Has difficulty understanding time-related concepts	Does not understand the terms 'before', 'after', etc. or Does not understand that 'tomorrow' and 'Tuesday' are the same day
	Has difficulty understanding space-related concepts	Does not understand the terms 'under', 'over', 'inside', etc.
	Has difficulty understanding humor, irony, idioms, proverbs (has a tendency to take things literally)	Does not understand the expression 'Nice of you to show up' or interprets it to mean that the behaviour is appropriate
	Has difficulty understanding long and complex sentences	Does not understand instructions with multiple elements such as: 'Put your foot in first, your arm behind, and lift your head up'
	Has difficulty following or holding a conversation	Finds it difficult to make connections between what is said and tends to jump from one thing to another

Language impairments are “invisible” disabilities”²⁰. People with these difficulties have no physical characteristics the way someone in a wheelchair or with Down syndrome does²⁰. Therefore, it is impossible to know whether a young person has a language impairment before engaging with them. These communication difficulties therefore affect socialization and verbal interactions of these young people²¹. They can hinder various communication situations. Because of this, they can also influence the participation of young people with language impairments in sport and physical activity.

Sport and physical activity provides interaction opportunities that are different than those in a school or family environment. Analyzes have shown that physical education classes and organized activities allow young people to interact, to come into contact physically either intentionally or unintentionally, and to establish team strategies. Through these activities, young people can learn many things that can affect other aspects of their lives²².



The photo shows 2 young boys hugging each other with a big smile.

2. BENEFITS OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

For a number of years, physical activity has been known to have health benefits for individuals, including children and adolescents ²³. Sport and physical activity has many benefits (Active Healthy Kids) ¹. Many studies have shown that participating in sport and physical activity has physical, psychological, cognitive and social benefits for everyone, including young people with language impairments²⁴⁻²⁷. The interviews conducted have revealed many benefits to sport and physical activity. Table 1 shows the main benefits documented in the scientific literature and the interviews conducted.

Table 2: Benefits of sport and physical activity

Areas	Benefits
Physical	Improves endurance Improves strength Results in weight loss Boosts energy
Psychological	Boosts self-esteem Improves management of impulsivity, anger and aggressiveness Allows the young person to develop
Cognitive	Enables discipline Enables one to achieve goals and success Develops strategies Improves listening skills and concentration
Social	Develops social skills Allows the young person to participate in various activities Creates situations where the young person must interact and communicate with other young people on the team

24-27

2.1. Physical

From a physical perspective, many studies have shown that sport and physical activity can improve many physical abilities^{23, 25-27}. In fact, participating in such activities helps improve physical abilities such as endurance and muscle strength²⁵⁻²⁷. They also play a role in weight loss^{1, 23}. Participating in sport and physical activity also boosts energy^{25, 26}.

2.2. Psychological

From a psychological perspective, participating in sport and physical activity can contribute to developing a positive self-image, which in turn improves self-esteem and self-confidence in young people²⁸. Participating in physical activities and sports can contribute to the management of emotions such as impulsivity, anger and aggressiveness^{25,26}. Therefore, this activity time is used as an outlet, a moment of release to achieve a state of relaxation and both physical and psychological well-being²⁸. Sport and physical activity can also contribute to the development of autonomy and independence²⁵⁻²⁷.

2.3. Cognitive

Sport and physical activity also has cognitive benefits. Participating in such activities enables discipline and provides opportunities to achieve goals and to be successful²⁵⁻²⁷. It also provides an opportunity to develop strategies alone and as a team. The various instructions given during sport and physical activity as well as the partners involved in the activity help develop listening skills and concentration^{25,26}.

2.4. Social

Team sports and physical activities take place in a context that somewhat resembles a micro-society where young people can learn to improve their ability to interact with their peers^{25,26,29}. This environment fosters the development of responsible attitudes and behaviours because the young person learns to become integrated, build healthy relationships, get along with teammates, compete against an opponent and work as a team²⁹. Thus, the young person learns to communicate adequately with others, to open up to others and to develop more appropriate social interactions. In short, participating in sport and physical activity helps learn how to live in society because it allows one to live experiences with others, to assert oneself, to communicate, to feel valued, to be part of a team, and to feel useful and accepted.

For young people with language impairments, the socio-emotional dimension is one of most affected aspects of their development^{14, 15}. Physical and sporting activities also provide an opportunity for young people to be outside the family home, to participate in an activity without their families and to meet people²⁷. The experience can be positive but also have many drawbacks. The next section shows the possible constraints to participation in sport and physical activity.



The photo shows a young people hockey team listening to their coach.

3. CONSTRAINTS TO PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Sport and physical activity has various effects on those who take part in it^{22, 25}. However, some constraints can hinder participation in these activities. The following lines describe the constraints relating to young people with language impairments and those relating to the physical and social environment. These constraints have been documented in the scientific literature as well as the different types of interviews conducted in this study.

3.1 Relating to young people with language impairments

Constraints are mainly related to speech and verbal comprehension⁹. Young people with language impairments can also have limitations in areas that require little or no language^{4, 5, 30-32}.

Speech is a motor activity that involves the coordination between several articulators such as the tongue, lips and palate³⁰. Young people with an expressive language disorder involving speech have difficulty with the coordination of these articulators³⁰. As a result, they have more difficulty with overall coordination³³.

Several studies have been conducted to verify the relation between language impairment and clumsiness³⁴. Hill (2001) conducted a review of the literature about young people with language impairments and motor disorders. It appears that motor deficits, both in terms of fine and gross motor skills, are characteristics found in young people with language impairments³⁵. They are “more likely the norm than the exception” (Hill, 2001, p. 19). A parent corroborated this observation when he described his son’s lack of muscle tone when he sat:

“He had no muscle tone; I’m not lying, teachers would tie him to his chair so he could sit up straight. They would use a belt to tie his upper body to the chair so he would sit up straight because he couldn’t. He was slouched over and wasn’t able to sit at his desk.”

Moreover, Zelaznik and Goffman (2010) evaluated the gross motor skills of young people with dysphasia. Their results showed that young people with language impairments have weaker gross motor skills than the average of the control group³⁰. However, it is also possible that young people with language impairments did not understand the instructions to the test they had to take³⁰.

In its definition of language impairment, the *Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du sport* (MELS, 2007) explains that young people can experience difficulties with spatial and temporal organization. They can also have difficulty acquiring new concepts²¹.

When speaking of her daughter's participation in activities, a mother said:

"Today we participate in an activity and tomorrow...we won't start with the same [thing]; we do the same warm-up but we'll change the routine and do something else...so it's more difficult for her [her daughter]...if we change too often...that's what's difficult for her, she works well with a routine."

However, young people with language impairments are a heterogeneous population³⁶, meaning that a young person may have a limitation that another does not. For example, analyzes of interviews with young people showed that a young person may have trouble remembering when he left a recent activity while another knows exactly in what year he started it.

It is also possible that as they get older, young people become more aware of their limitations and abilities. A professional interviewed said that adolescence is a period when:

"They become aware...for some of them, it bursts their bubble and they realize...that it will always be this way". A parent added "...that from the time he started becoming aware of the differences between his disability and other people's...it stopped him."

The following table presents a summary of disorders that may be associated with language impairment and that may act as constraints to participation in sport and physical activity.

Table 3: Summary of disorders that may be associated with language impairment and that may affect sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments

Components of associated disorders	Examples of difficulties
Motor aspects (coordination, dissociation, balance, muscle tone, fine motor skills, relaxation)	Overall coordination Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination Endurance and agility Moving from one place to the other Imitation of simple and complex movements Delay in determining hand dominance Reproducing voluntary movements
Spatiotemporal organization	Acquiring new concepts relating to space, quantity and quality Spatial orientation Direction of movements Vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimension Acquiring new concepts relating to time and length of time Temporal orientation Speed of execution
Sensory perception	Visual perception Auditory discrimination Difficulty grasping objects Avoidance reaction to certain physical contact, sticky textures, certain clothing and food textures
Abstraction	Understanding more abstract concepts (colors, numbers)
Generalization	Assimilating new knowledge and reusing it in various contexts Remembering knowledge acquired over time
Behaviour	Attention deficit with or without hyperactivity and impulsivity Aggressiveness when the young person isn't being understood Isolation, opposition and avoidance Rigidity and overreaction to changes in routine

4, 5, 8, 13, 21, 32, 35, 37

Despite these constraints, young people with speech and language impairments do not have a limited interest in participating in sport and physical activity³⁸. Constraints may arise from the physical or social environment rather than from the young person. The following section explores the constraints to participation in sport and physical activity relating to the physical and social environment.

3.2 Relating to the physical and social environment

A young person with a language impairment may not face any constraints or have special needs relating to participation in sport and physical activity. Indeed, as stated by the MELS (2007), the young person is mostly limited in terms of understanding instructions and how to communicate^{3, 9, 39}. Analyses of interviews conducted with parents and educational and training professionals corroborate these observations.

Coaches and teachers are among the main people to take part in the young person's participation in sport and physical activity. Therefore, they are influential people in the young person's participation in sport and physical activity. Due to a lack of openness, knowledge, time or resources, a coach might not welcome a young person with a language impairment. A young person described the influence a coach had over her and her friend's participation, both of whom have a language impairment:

"We decided to stop at the same time [her and her friend] because...they changed coaches...it's not the same coaches every year...I think it's because [of] the change of coach...that they decided not to take us",

The parent of this young person added that *"even if we come with the proper tools to help, she didn't have any time to lose so then, there's no openness... this limits"*

The integration of young people with language impairments might also not be done correctly. A parent showed that when a young person is integrated in a regular group, *"the teacher might not necessarily know what a dysphasic is...she doesn't know, she can't explain."* He added that:

"They will try to integrate disabled children in regular groups without even preparing that group before. So the young person gets there and they do not understand...because they don't understand, and because of a lack of knowledge, the others make fun of him, imitate him, ignore him. One or two might be nice and take him by the hand, but...we know that generally, integration is still poorly done on that level...because there is no preparation, nothing is done".

Because of this, young people with language impairments have less contact with their peers during activities^{3, 39}. Playtime is difficult because some young people do not have the abilities required to play the games and they do not want to be rejected³¹. A young interviewee said that she got along well with the other girls on her team but that *"it depends on the day...and their personality as well...sometimes [they did] things to discourage others on the team."* One parent

added that *“students are often mean to each other...in the end, it might mean that Simon¹ doesn’t feel like it anymore”*.

Family might also act as a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity². Parents might lack the time, skill or financial means to plan activities. An occupational therapist explained that:

“There are some parents who really encourage physical activity and who will push their kids to participate in all kinds of activities and who will follow them in that path. We see a difference in the young person compared to when parents are maybe sometimes...a little less present or a little less...able to push their kid or who promote those abilities a bit less.”

An occupational therapist added that: *“these children have so many needs that sometimes, well, parents have other priorities.”*

However, participating in sport and physical activity provides an opportunity to reduce discrimination and marginalization that young people with language impairments may experience⁴⁰. A professional explained that two young people with language impairments started playing ball hockey and that at the beginning, *“the others looked at them like they were aliens or like a cone that didn’t do much...but after some time...they play, they have fun with the guys, they make jokes...their...attitudes changed.”*

Table 4 on the following page shows a summary of constraints relating to the physical and social environment that were mentioned in different interviews.

¹ The young person’s name has been changed to protect his privacy.

Table 4: Summary of constraints relating to the physical and social environment that affect sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments

Individuals involved	Examples
Professionals (coaches, teachers, educators etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too focused on competition Lack of openness Lack of knowledge Lack of resources
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intimidation Lack of knowledge Lack of awareness Inadequate integration
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overprotection of their children Lack of participation in sport and physical activity Lack of time Denial about the young person's permanent situation
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial need Availability of activity Type of activity Transition from elementary to high school Lack of support

Analyses of interviews revealed the need to adapt the way the activity is presented rather than the activity itself. The following table shows communication strategies to adapt the presentation of the activity so that it is better understood by the young person with a language impairment.

Table 5: Communication strategies

Communication strategies	Examples
Get the young person's attention	<p>Use the young person's name</p> <p>Make eye contact</p> <p>Control background noise</p> <p>Support the message using gestures and mimes, when possible</p> <p>Emphasize important words in the instructions by changing intonation and facial expressions</p>
Adapt the message, explanations, and learning activities	<p>Decrease the amount of information given</p> <p>Give one simple instruction at a time</p> <p>Use concrete, familiar vocabulary</p> <p>Speak more slowly</p> <p>Demonstrate</p> <p>Avoid long explanations</p> <p>Use concrete examples</p> <p>Stick to a routine</p>
Check the young person's verbal comprehension	<p>Allow time for the person to understand and answer the question</p> <p>Allow the young person to repeat what was said</p> <p>Ask questions to check comprehension</p>
Reformulate explanations and concepts taught	<p>Use replication, repetition and reformulation when necessary</p> <p>Use visual cues (gestures, writing, drawings, pictograms, etc.)</p>
Let the young person express him/herself	<p>Let the young person have a turn to speak during a discussion</p> <p>Use visual aids</p> <p>Encourage the young person to use gestures to complete their message</p> <p>Check your understanding by rewording</p> <p>Encourage all efforts and attempts</p>

41-43

3.3 Means to reduce constraints

Scientific literature and interviews have revealed different means to overcome the constraints faced by young people with language impairments.

Table 6: Means to reduce constraints

Individuals involved	Means
Professionals (coaches, teachers, educators, etc.)	Use communication strategies Be consistent in your requests and expectations Place the young person close to you and away from the door so s/he can see you well Use videos (YouTube, for example) to complement learning activities Avoid overstimulation (too many words or images, for example) Have clear, simple, and easily achievable objectives Review what has already been taught Discuss with the parent
Young people	Encourage the presence of friends in the group Educate other young people in the group about disabilities
Parents	Know your child's strengths and difficulties Provide an explanation sheet that describes your child's strengths and difficulties Discuss with the professional (coach, teacher, educator, etc.)

41-43

These means may not overcome all constraints the young person faces. Indeed, it is important to validate the means we think are most effective with the young person and their family.

4. PROGRAMS AND TOOLS AVAILABLE

There are various tools and associations available to help professionals and parents. They can support the adoption of a healthy lifestyle and sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments. Table 7 on the following page provides a list of associations and tools that support sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments.

The document “Guide to resources per region” lists various organizations and programs in Québec that support young people with functional limitations and their families. Foundations that support the participation of these young people in sport and physical activity are also listed. A list of organizations and programs per region in Québec that can support the participation of young people with functional limitations in sport and physical activity is also included. This information is relevant to all types of functional limitations.

4.1 Books

There are various books that explain language impairments to other young people and that provide ideas for dealing with young people with language impairments appropriately. The following list is relevant for professionals and parents and will provide them with tools to deal with young people with language impairments and other people involved.

Adam, É. (2007). *Le secret de Jeannot*. Laval: Dysphasie+.

Marleau, B. (2008). *Vincent et les pommes, la dysphasie*. Longueuil: Boomerang éditeur jeunesse.

Noreau, D. (2010). *Une histoire sur... la dysphasie - Les victoires de Grégoire*. Saint-Lambert: Dominique et Compagnie.

Touzin, M., & Leroux, M.-N. (2011). *100 idées pour venir en aide aux enfants dysphasiques*. Paris: Tom Pousse.

Table 7: Associations and tools that support sport and physical activity for young people with language impairments

Name of the organization or program ²	Web site of the organization or program	Role of the organization or program
Association québécoise de la dysphasie	http://dysphasie.qc.ca/fr/index.php [french only]	Brings together parents who help one another, come together, and who improve the services offered to their children with dysphasia.
Association québécoise des troubles d'apprentissage	http://aqeta.qc.ca/ [french only]	Disseminates information and provision of services available for people with a learning disability.
Blogue Orthophonie	http://www.blogorthophonie.com/ [french only]	Blog that presents information collected from parents and professionals who work with young people with language impairments.
Dysphasie Lanaudière	http://dysphasielanaudiere.org/ [french only]	Offers services and activities for families with a child with dysphasia residing in the <i>Lanaudière</i> area.
Dysphasie plus	http://www.dysphasiplus.com/ [french only]	Offers support to families and young people with dysphasia.
Évaluation des Besoins et Organisation des Services (ÉBOS) ⁴⁴	(819) 376-5011	Tool to evaluate the abilities and needs of young people with dysphasia between the ages of 4 and 15.
Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec	http://ooaq.qc.ca/index.html [french only]	Protects the public by promoting access to quality communication services.
Guide pratique AVS : À vos stylos !	http://guidespratique.savs.fr/images/public/guidedysphasies.pdf [french only]	Proposes courses of action for many disorders such as dysphasia to improve certain aspects including spatiotemporal organization, autonomy and self-esteem.
Les Pictogrammes	http://www.lespictogrammes.com [french only]	Gallery of pictograms to facilitate communication.

² Organizations and programs are listed in alphabetical order

5. KEY POINTS TO SUPPORT PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- ❖ Sport and physical activity has physical, psychological, social and cognitive benefits for young people with language impairments that are transferrable to various situations of everyday life.
- ❖ However, young people can face constraints to participation in sport and physical activity that may be due to the language impairment, associated disorders and/or the physical and social environment of the activity.
- ❖ Speech and language impairments are manifested differently from one young person to another and can be manifested as difficulty understanding questions, instructions, explanations or difficulty expressing oneself (e.g.: pronouncing sounds, formulating sentences, word choice, organizing speech). Cognitive, motor and sensory difficulties may be associated to oral language impairments, which contributes to further decreasing the social participation of young people in sport and physical activity.
- ❖ There are different communication strategies and various means to reduce constraints and to improve the way we deal with young people with language impairments. The best means to remember are:
 - **Acquire a routine** in the course structure and the exercises presented (e.g. warm-up period).
 - **Be structured** in the way you convey messages (e.g.: give brief and precise instructions, make sure the young person is looking at you and is attentive).
 - **Encourage consistency** between professionals who work with the young person (e.g.: same approach and ways to communicate).
 - **Demonstrate and repeat** (e.g.: use the same verbal statements and words to explain an activity or a movement to perform).
 - **Use visual cues** to facilitate the young person's understanding, help them focus on the task, help them express themselves (e.g.: images, meaningful symbols, pictograms, videos).

- ❖ The key words to remember when dealing with young people with language impairments are:
 - **Routine**
 - **Structure**
 - **Consistency**
 - **Repetition**
 - **Visual cues**



The photo shows 2 young swimmers with their arm in the air, smiling.

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