

TENNIS

ANY

ABILITY

LEARNING DISABILITY

Coaching Tips Factsheet

WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABILITY?

Learning Disability (LD) is defined as a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities, which affects an individual for their whole life; for example, in carrying out household tasks, socialising or managing money. People with a LD tend to take longer to learn things and may need support to develop new skills, understand complicated information and interact with other people (MENCAP).

LD is often confused with dyslexia and mental health problems, however they are learning difficulties as unlike a disability it does not affect intellect. Mental health problems may be overcome with treatment which is not true of LD (MENCAP).

General Information

When we refer to learning disability (LD) tennis at a recreational level, we are including learning difficulties as well. This includes: Down's Syndrome, Asperger's Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). However in LD specific competitions and tournaments criteria for entry is connected to the person's IQ (under 75) and are only open to those who are eligible. For more information on Learning Difficulties please refer to our coaching resource.

It is important to understand that each person's learning disability has different symptoms and characteristics so we should tailor tennis to suit their learning needs. The level of support an individual needs depends on specific factors, including the severity of their learning disability. For example, a person with a mild learning disability may only need support with simple tasks such as joining a sports club or getting directions to a venue. However, someone with a profound learning disability may need full-time care and support with every aspect of their life – they may also have physical disabilities.



DID YOU KNOW...

- **THERE'S OVER 1.74 MILLION** people in England have a learning disability (Sport England – Mapping Disability 2016).
- **75% OF GPs** have received no training to help them treat people with a learning disability (MENCAP).
- **Players with a learning disability can compete in non-disabled tennis sessions and competitions** as there are no adaptations to the game for LD.

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFO

For further information on learning disability tennis please contact the Tennis Foundation team:

EMAIL: info@tennisfoundation.org.uk **CALL:** 084587 20522 **VISIT:** www.tennisfoundation.org.uk

Player Pathway and Competition

There is a LD player pathway from local sessions and beginner/improver camps, to national and international tournaments (Special Olympics and INAS). For more information on the player pathway and competitions please read the Tennis Foundation's Game On: Great Britain's Disability Tennis Pathways booklet.

In performance sport learning disability is defined as having an IQ of 75 or less, having significant limitations in adaptive behaviour, and this being evident before the person is 18 years old. This does not automatically exclude those with autism or other conditions. However, if autism or another condition is the primary or only diagnosis, then it is unlikely they would meet this particular definition to be eligible to compete in a learning disability event. We would encourage all players to also play in a mainstream environment where possible.

When coaching players with a learning disability, it is best to adapt your methods as opposed to abandoning your usual coaching style. Coaches should attempt to:

- Treat someone who has a learning disability according to their age, rather than presumed IQ.
- Strive to have a predictable, consistent and organised coaching environment.
- Do not presume the person won't be able to answer your questions. If the individual has a severe degree of learning disability then speak to the parent, partner, friend or carer.
- Do not finish the person's sentences, or presume that you know what they mean before they have finished talking.
- Always check for understanding and use open ended questions (e.g. 'where do you go when you get to the red sign?')

SPACE/ ENVIRONMENT	TASKS	EQUIPMENT/ RULES	PEOPLE/ COMMUNICATION	SAFETY
Allow extra space on courts for safety.	Break things down into simple tasks.	Could use larger sponge balls and Mini Tennis rackets.	See the ability in front of you, not the disability.	Take into account any medical or behavioural considerations.
Place players into positions on court.	Use plenty of visual demonstrations.	Use colourful equipment and visual aids.	Players need same skills as any other player.	For example, dehydration can be more of an issue for some disabled people.
Increase targets and decrease distances to make tasks easier.	Repeat steps of task frequently and allow more time for assimilation.		Need to set boundaries for behaviour.	Ensure you are aware of all of the players' whereabouts at all times as attention spans may be shorter and players could wander away from the court.
			Use lots of positive praise and feedback.	
Consider vacation procedures in an emergency.	Use trigger words to aid movement.			
Be aware of players' whereabouts at all times.				

FOR MORE COACHING TIPS...

...please read our **Disability Tennis Coaching Resource**.