

Inclusive coaching with the TREE Model

Inclusive coaching ensures that every participant, regardless of ability, experience, or background, can take part, develop skills, and enjoy sport.

The TREE model gives coaches a simple framework to make thoughtful adjustments that open participation for everyone. TREE stands for: Teaching style, Rules, Equipment, and Environment: four areas where small changes can make a big difference.

Use it to plan, deliver, and reflect on every session.

T - Teaching Style

The way a coach communicates, demonstrates, and interacts with participants. Inclusive teaching adapts communication methods so everyone can understand, engage, and succeed.

R- Rules

Rules give structure and fairness to games, but they can also exclude. Inclusive coaching means adjusting the rules so all participants can take part safely and meaningfully, then progressively reintroducing standard rules as skills develop.

E - Equipment

Equipment can help level the playing field. Adapting size, weight, colour, or texture can make sport safer, easier to understand, and more enjoyable for all.

E - Environment

The physical, social, and sensory environment shapes how participants experience sport. Coaches can adapt the space and atmosphere to ensure safety, comfort, and access for everyone.



T - Teaching style

Practical strategies:

- Provide clear, step-by-step instructions using short sentences.
- Demonstrate each activity visually and physically: “show more, talk less.”
- Use a mix of communication styles: visual aids, gestures, tactile cues (also called touch-based guidance, e.g., a tap on the shoulder to turn), and reminder cues displayed on a board (e.g., a card with 3 key steps with words and pictures: Run > Look > Pass).
- Check for understanding by asking players to show or repeat the task.
- Use positive reinforcement to build confidence and motivation.
- Encourage peer mentoring by pairing athletes of different abilities to support learning.
- Offer choices in how to participate (e.g., one-handed passes, smaller steps, or verbal responses).

Examples:

- **Soccer:** Demonstrate a passing drill slowly, then ask participants to try it at their own pace before adding movement.
- **Tennis:** Use markers on the court to show target zones for serving rather than describing them verbally.
- **Swimming:** Show the stroke technique poolside before entering the water; use hand gestures for key cues (“kick,” “breathe,” “reach”).



**Start with one
small adaptation in
each TREE area.**

R - Rules

Practical strategies:

- Start simple: limit the number of rules in early drills or modified games.
- Modify time, scoring, or player numbers to ensure balanced participation.
- Allow flexibility: extra touches, longer turns, or different scoring systems.
- Introduce “inclusive” options like safe zones or bonus points for teamwork and fair play.
- Consider removing scoring when teaching a new skill.
- Implement additional rules to make the game safer and accessible (e.g., no tackling).
- Focus on progress and enjoyment over competition.
- Discuss and agree on rule adaptations with the group. Make inclusion a team value.

Examples:

- **Basketball:** Allow two bounces before dribbling or reduce team size for more touches per player.
- **Cricket:** Everyone bowls or bats in rotation, regardless of ability; adjust overs to fit time or comfort levels.
- **Athletics:** Use “personal best” targets instead of strict placement results; extend time limits for field events.

Inclusive coaching is not about lowering expectations, it's about removing barriers so every participant can contribute, develop, and thrive.



E - Equipment

Practical strategies:

- Offer a range of equipment: lighter, softer, or larger balls; adjustable bats, rackets, or sticks.
- Use brightly coloured or sound-based equipment to support participants with low vision.
- Add tactile or visual markers to boundaries, lines, and targets.
- Allow players to choose what feels most comfortable or effective.
- Store adapted equipment visibly and encourage all players to try it, normalising variety.

Examples:

- **Netball:** Use a lighter ball during skill-building or for younger/less experienced players.
- **Hockey:** Try a larger ball and wider stick for new participants to improve control.
- **Golf:** Use larger club heads or soft practice balls for beginners or wheelchair users.



Involve players in the process.

Ask them: "What would make this activity easier or more fun for you?"

E - Environment

Practical strategies:

- Check access: ensure smooth surfaces, ramps, and clear pathways for mobility aids.
- Adjust lighting, sound, and temperature to suit participants' sensory needs.
- Use smaller playing areas to reduce fatigue or confusion; increase space for wheelchair or mobility users.
- Provide seating or rest areas for breaks.
- Clearly mark boundaries and zones with cones, colours, or textures.
- Manage the social environment: promote teamwork, respect, and inclusion across all participants.

Examples:

- **Athletics:** Mark wider lanes for mobility device users; provide shaded rest points near the track.
- **Swimming:** Use contrasting lane colours and textured tiles near the pool edge.
- **Rugby:** Create smaller playing zones and ensure even surfaces for safe movement.



Use TREE as a checklist before, during, and after training

Session element	Adapt training sessions using the TREE model
Warm-up	E.g., simplify instructions; demonstrate visually; use soft or light equipment.
Main activity	E.g., adjust rules to match abilities; modify playing space.
Game play	E.g., rotate roles; balance teams; reward teamwork.
Cool-down	E.g., offer seated stretches; encourage participants to share what worked for them.