Hi Peter Downs here from The Inclusion Club.

Recently we’ve had a few questions about the TREE framework that we have talked about in previous episodes of The Inclusion Club.

So today I’m going to go through an explanation of the TREE framework and how to use it.

So, what is the TREE framework?

TREE is an acronym that stands for:

- Teaching or instructional style
- Rules and/or regulations
- Environments
- Equipment

These are all key elements of any activity space. They are common among all types of activity - whether its a sport or a game.
They are easily understood and easily remembered.

And they can easily be changed and adapted.

Think about TREE as a way to order your thoughts - to create ways to adapt the way you Teach or the Rules that you use or the Environment the activity takes place in or the Equipment that you have.

Hope that makes sense.

Let's look at some examples of Teaching or instructional style.

Remember, the T in TREE stands for Teaching style (or method) but could cover any form of instruction including coaching.

Whatever activity you are teaching you can consider different teaching methods.

Such as, manual or non-manual demonstration, verbal instruction, exploration, modeling, chaining and learning by doing.

Now, the teaching method employed will depend on a number of things, not least the abilities of the group and your intended outcomes. Basically, what you are trying to achieve.
So if you have a person with a vision impairment in the group you might want to focus on verbal instruction, or for a person with hearing impairment, manual demonstration.

Pretty straightforward stuff so far.

But...

Teaching modifications for people with physical disabilities and, to a degree, sensory impairments, are often easier than for people with an intellectual disability.

Why do I say that?

Well, think of it this way. People with physical disability often bring their own adaptation with them - to a degree.

The wheelchair is an adaptation that allows someone with limited or no movement in the lower body to participate in an activity that requires movement.

A person with an arm or leg amputation will have a prosthetic that allows them to participate too.

Similarly, a person with vision impairment will bring with them spectacles and a person with hearing impairment, a hearing aid.
Let me ask a question - what does a person with an intellectual disability bring with them that allows them to participate in an activity?

In a physical sense - nothing!

That’s the difference and that’s why it is often harder to adapt an activity for a person with an intellectual disability than it is for people with other disabilities.

**It is also easier to see the changes that need to be made for people with physical or sensory impairments than it is for people with an intellectual disability.**

A useful way to think about this is to think about the term **cognitive prosthesis**.

I know that sounds a bit academic but it makes sense.

Your teaching method can provide a cognitive prosthesis for the person with an intellectual disability.

This is why teaching or instructional style is important, particularly for people with an intellectual disability.

A quick disclaimer though - I have to generalize here to make a point. Clearly, you may have to make significant modifications in teaching for people with high physical support needs. Everything is context specific in this respect.

Hope you are OK with that!

Next, what about **Rules and regulations**?

Sport is governed by rules. Without rules there is no sport. Rules give structure and create competitive games.

Even in practice and non-competitive activities some rules - even if they are not written - are needed and used.

But, think about this...
The vast majority of rules in sport and for games are created for the general population who do not have a disability.

They do not easily cater for diversity.

So, to include people with disability into these sports and games we have to adapt and change these rules.

This is a challenge, particularly when it comes to organized sports.

But, rules are made by human beings aren’t they!

So, human beings can change them.

Sounds simple when you put it like that!

This is particularly important for games and practice.

Unfortunately we are often obsessed with rules, particularly for those of us that grow up with organized sports. So changing them isn’t quite so simple sometimes!

When developing rules around an activity it’s good practice to always consider what outcomes you are trying to achieve.
What is the purpose of the rule?

Does it unnecessarily exclude or restrict anyone from taking part?

In football practice do you always have to throw the ball in from the sideline over-arm?

Can you throw it in under-arm?

Of course, you can. We can always change rules.

Next, what about the Environment the activity takes place in?

Environments can make a big difference to inclusion. An environment, in this context, refers to the physical place where the activity happens.

It could be a gymnasium, a hall, a playground, a stadium - you get the picture!

What things make a difference and can be changed in an environment?

The surface - it could be grass, concrete, wood, water ...
The lighting - could be artificial or natural, light or dark ...
The temperature - it could be hot or cold ...
The noise - it could be foreground or background noise, loud or quiet ...
The organization - your place could be cluttered or tidy ...
The number of people - there could be many people around in close proximity or you might have the environment to yourself. Your group may be big or small ...
The unnecessary distractions - such as unused equipment ...
Changing the environment can be pretty easy yet make a significant difference to how well some people are included into what is happening.

Simply changing the surface from grass to a hard surface makes a big difference to how well someone in a wheelchair can participate.

This is a good time to consider one of the **Golden Rules of Inclusion**.

It is important when adapting any elements of the TREE framework in a group situation to think about how your changes **effect the integrity of the activity** for the group as a whole.

This is known as **The Balancing Act**.

The Balancing Act simply means considering the effect of your changes on the activity as a whole.

On the one hand you want to **maximize individual potential** and on the other keep the **integrity of the activity intact for everyone**.

When adapting and modifying a group activity to include an individual with a disability **The Balancing Act is an important consideration**.

Finally, let’s consider **Equipment**.
Equipment, like other elements of the TREE framework, can easily be changed to make activities more inclusive. You can change height, size, colour, shape, weight, how much a ball bounces, distance, the noise equipment makes, texture ...

As a general rule it’s a good idea to have a variety of equipment alternatives available, ask people what equipment might work best in any given activity and experiment with how different types of equipment work in any given context.

Again, we are often constrained by what we traditionally know and what the rules say - particularly when it comes to organized sports.

But for games and practice we can be much more creative. If you want to slow a ball game down why not use a partially deflated ball?

If someone has difficulty swinging a heavy bat why not use a lighter plastic bat or even rolled up newspaper!

Use your imagination and creativity.

OK, I hope that gives you a useful introduction into what the TREE framework is all about and how you can use it. It’s a universal tool that helps you facilitate inclusion.
“Change what you can change, accept what you can’t change, and have the ability to recognize the difference”