

Teaching people with developmental disabilities to ski

- a)** Carefully review the medical information on the student application. If your student is on medication, be aware of any potential side effects. Before skiing, verify that medications have been taken. During warm up exercises evaluate the student's physical condition (balance, range of motion, strength, coordination, etc.) Try to identify some of his abilities and weaknesses before getting on the snow.
- b)** Thoroughly read the Learning Styles, Teaching Styles and ATS Teaching Model handouts. They are excellent resources from which you can determine what will work best for both you and your student.
- c)** Make sure your student's equipment is fitted properly and is in good condition. Ending up with another person's equipment or mismatched equipment can create instant problems. When the student can execute wide track parallel turns, poles can be introduced. It is the instructor's responsibility to pick up and return equipment to the Rental Shop. Make sure your student is properly dressed for the weather. The ASP building has gloves, mittens, hats, bibs and coats for use. There is also sunscreen, sunglasses, goggles and lip balm. Clothing and/or eyewear should be returned at the end of the lesson.
- d)** In working with the developmentally disabled, you are basically, using the American Teaching System (ATS). However, you aren't modifying technique as much as you are their behavior and your communication with them. The key is to make it fun yet safe. Create a positive atmosphere.
- e)** Behavioral problems, including social inappropriateness, may arise and cause great frustration for both student and instructor. Some of the behavioral problems can be prevented if the instructor makes it clear from the beginning who is in charge. This will give the student a feeling of direction and alleviate possible manipulation. Discuss with family members or group home case workers what coping methods work best with difficult behaviors. Do not hesitate to seek advice.
- f)** The ski bra is handy if the student is unable to form a wedge. This adaptive tool along with the reverse wedge, bamboo pole and tether straps (demonstrated in clinics) should be used only as training devices so the student does not become dependent on them. Do not allow your student to grasp or hang on to you.
The touch system is a great way to communicate proper body position to a developmentally disabled student: hands on thighs; flex in ankles, knees and hips; raise chin to look ahead. Be sensitive to those who may be uncomfortable with touch as in the case of many people with autism.
- g)** To prevent confusion, it is necessary to be explicit in your instruction. For example, when a student is instructed to side step up a hill, a ski pole can be used to designate the distance he is required to climb. Such visual aids in measuring distances can prevent the frustration that may be caused by not being properly informed as to the task at hand.
- h)** The instructor should learn to modulate his voice and treat the developmentally disabled individual according to his chronological age. Repeat instructions often. Use simple, concrete terms to express what you are trying to say, and, if possible, try to get your student to respond verbally to see if he really understands what you have said. Clap hands or repeat student's name to get attention. Remain in the skiers comfort zone as fear will block fun. Find creative ways to challenge student to achieve next skill. Clinicians will provide helpful hints, game ideas and role playing techniques.

j) Teach your student the SKIERS' RESPONSIBILITY CODE found on the back page of the American Teaching System handout. Incorporate this in your lesson. For example, the middle of a catwalk or trail is not the place to stop and talk with your student. You *and* your student should KNOW THE CODE. Remember that you are still the uphill skier when skiing backwards in front of your student. The responsibility of avoiding others below is yours. This will require practice on your part.

k) Often times people will inadvertently cut your student off or cause a collision. Try to avoid these occurrences by maintaining minimal distance between you and your student. Your own peripheral vision should be acutely attune to approaching skiers or obstacles. Model for your student both ideal technical skills as well as ideal social skills. Do not loose your temper or verbally bash other skiers.

l) Make eye contact with the lift operator in the event you require a slow down when off loading. Use proper hand signals. It is a good practice to tell the loading lift operator to call the top with your "slow" request. The student should be seated between you and the lift operator. If the actions of the ski area personnel concern you please see the Program Director directly.

m) Never select a run that requires more ability than your student possesses. Master very slight slopes before moving on. If you do get into a situation too steep, use the "two point hold" learned in clinics. Discuss an emergency "bail out" plan of action in the event your student is unable to avoid another skier or obstacle. Report all incidents and accidents immediately to the Day Coordinator or Program Director.