

ADAPTED

SWIMMING

Guide for Schools



ABOUT MOVE UNITED

Why Inclusion

Move United uses sports to push what's possible so everyone has equal access to sports and recreation in their community. Established in 1956, Move United is an Affiliate of the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee.

Move United provides adaptive sports to individuals with disabilities as a means to (1) improve health, (2) increase access to employment and economic stability, (3) strengthen social support and (4) advance social norms and attitudes about people with disabilities. Each of the four items are social determinants of health, according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2020.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education issued a Dear Colleague Letter in clarifying elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level schools' responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act) to provide extracurricular athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. The guidance clarifies when and how schools should include students with disabilities in interscholastic athletic programs, defines what true equal treatment of student athletes with disabilities means, and urges schools to create adapted interscholastic athletic programs for students with disabilities. With nearly 1 in 4 Americans living with a disability, schools have the opportunity to change the disability narrative, creating access and opportunities for inclusion.

What Move United Offers

- Introductory sport guidelines and best practices for adapted sports.
- Facilitation of training for your coaches and officials with adaptive sports experts. Access to hundreds of community based adaptive sports organizations, resources and tools for specific sports.
- Decades of experience in disability sport training, sport adaptations and adaptive equipment.

Sports Are Important for Students with Disabilities

Benefits for students with disabilities who participate in sports are similar to students without disabilities:

- Supports daily living activities and independence
- Reduces risk of health-related diseases (i.e. cancer, heart disease and diabetes).
- Improves mental health, reduces depression and anxiety.
- More likely to have better grades, school attendance and lower dropout rate.
- Builds camaraderie with peers, less likely to be bullied.
- Build discipline, self-esteem, confidence, and independence.
- Learn team work, skill development and goal setting.
- Can offer opportunities for successes in college, career and community.

Due to the resources available, it is possible to add adapted sports within school athletic programs without creating an undue administrative burden for State High School Associations or requiring the association to change existing rules for the athletes without disabilities.

Thank you to



for generously supporting this project.

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The content in this document is intended to provide guidelines and recommendations. Move United does not carry the authority to replace existing school or sport governing rules and regulations.



High School Athletic Associations across the country have easily integrated athletes with disabilities into regular and post-season competition.

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OVERVIEW

USA Swimming Guidelines for Athletes With Disabilities in Meets

The USA Swimming Rulebook allows the meet referee to modify the rules for athletes with disabilities. Competition rules for athletes with disabilities would be the same as those for non-disabled athletes unless the athlete's impairment doesn't allow the athlete to complete the stroke correctly.



Rule Modifications

Athlete and/or Coach Notifying the referee prior to competition of any disability and of the requested modification.

Referee Determines if the requested modifications are appropriate and can be met. Reasonable accommodations must be met per ADA guidelines.

Instructing the starter and turn officials as to the accommodations to be made for the athlete with a disability.

Modification Examples

- All facilities must be ADA accessible.
- No modifications need to be made to pools or lanes.
- A change in starting position.
- Reassignment of lanes within a heat.
- Allowing the athlete to have a personal assistant. Personal assistants are required to hold a USA Swimming Deck Pass. This includes a current background check and completion of the SafeSport course.
- Stroke/kick modifications.
- Allow additional time/location to exit the pool after each race.

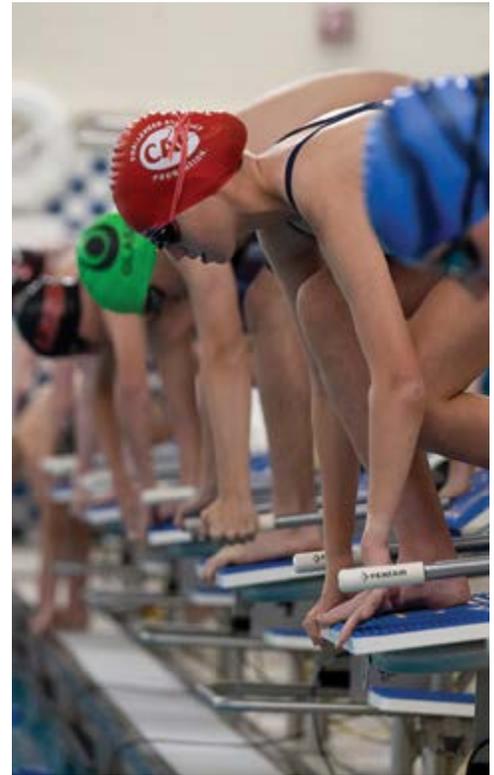
The content under adapted swimming rules (modifications, coaching, communication & accommodations) are from USA Swimming sanctioned programs. Meets and programs can utilize this information and expand it based on their own needs.



RULES

Examples:

- Athletes with limited or differing function in the hips or legs may not be able to complete a legal breaststroke kick. In these cases they must either show intent to kick or drag their legs. It is important to note that the attempted kick must be consistent throughout the entire race.
- Athletes without one or both hands are unable to do a two hand touch in butterfly or breast stroke.
- Athletes with one upper limb shorter than the other will not be able to touch with both hands in butterfly, but they should still bring their arms together simultaneously.
- Athletes may start from the water, the wall or the blocks, but should be given time to get into a starting position prior to a race. A coach may help the athlete get into a starting position and provide stability for balance. The coach is not permitted to provide any forward momentum to the athlete.
- Competition suits must be regular racing suits, but may be modified for fit based on disability. A floating or “wetsuit” is never legal in competition. All modifications must be approved by the meet referee.
- Paddles, fins, and braces are not allowed in competition. Taping for medical reasons is allowed as long as it is approved by the meet referee prior to the start of each meet session.



Modifications for Athletes with Visual Impairments

Start	<p>With an audible starting system, no modification is usually required for an athlete who is blind or has vision loss. An athlete may require assistance getting to and on the block. Be mindful of athletes with a visual impairment who also have a hearing impairment. Direct assistance at the block may be needed.</p> <p>Should the athlete feel insecure starting from the block or deck, an in water start is allowed.</p>
Lane Lines/Markers	<p>Bright colored lane lines or markers on the lane lines may be of assistance.</p> <p>Athletes will run into lane lines a lot while learning. Sharp/rough lane lines may be painful and cause the athlete frustration.</p>
Walls/Turns	<p>A bright colored marker may be placed on or near the wall for beginning teaching purposes to locate the wall. As they develop, the athlete should work on their stroke count.</p> <p>An athlete who is blind or has vision loss is permitted to have a personal assistant. “Tappers” use poles with soft tipped ends to tap the athlete as notification of turns and the finish.</p> <p>Sound devices shall not be used. It is the athlete’s responsibility to provide the tapper(s) who will be positioned within the confines of the athletes’s lane at each end of the pool. An individual tapper must be present at each end of the pool during a race. The tapper is not permitted to move from one end to the other.</p>

Modification for Athletes with Hearing Impairments

- Athletes with hearing impairments require a visual starting signal (strobe light or starter's arm signals).
- The referee may reassign lanes within the athlete's heat so that the strobe light or starter's arm signals can be more easily seen (see figures A & B for examples of signals).
- A false start rope is required in the event of a recall, provided the meet host is notified by the entry deadline that an athlete with a hearing impairment will be participating.
- The starter shall advise the athletes about the location of the strobe light and the light will be located where the athletes can clearly see it for the start.
- For backstroke starts the light should be positioned so that the athletes do not have to turn their heads to look backwards.

Figure A: Forward Start Above Figure:

1. Twist hand at chin level and short whistles
2. Arm overhead: athlete steps onto starting blocks
3. Arm moves to shoulder level: signal to "take your mark"
4. Arm moves to side of body: starting signal

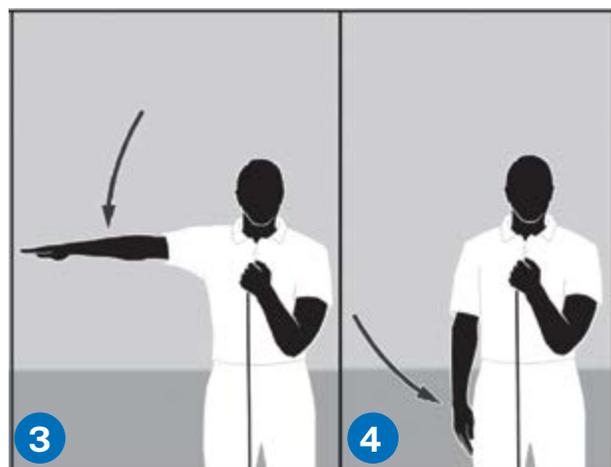
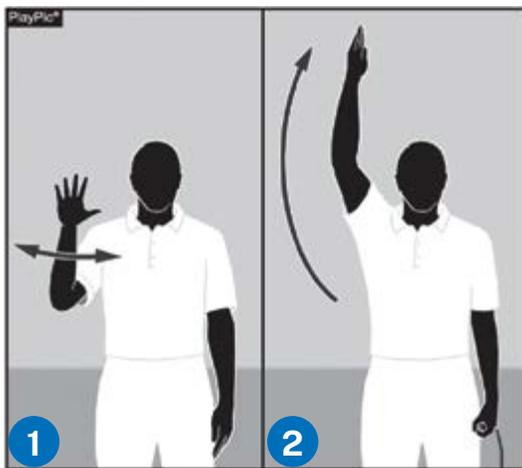
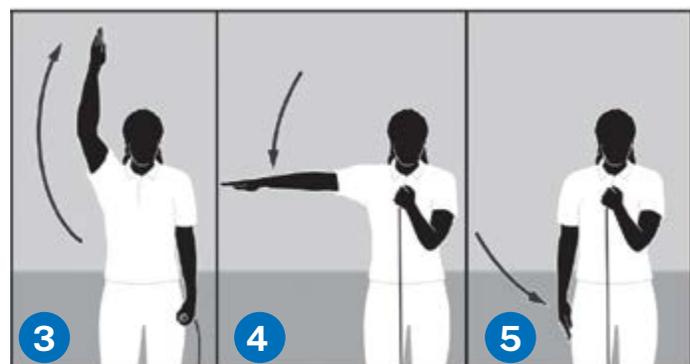
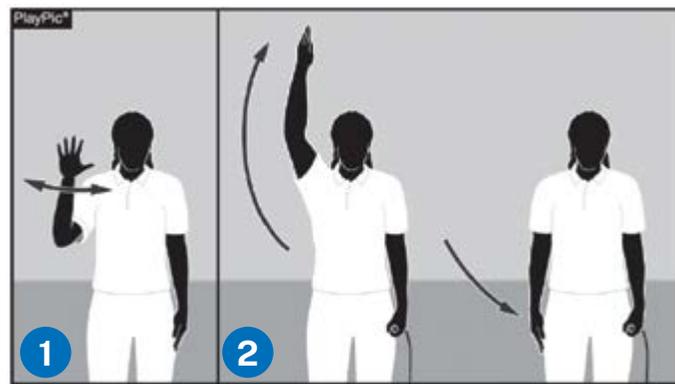


Figure B: Backstroke Start

1. Twist hand at chin level: short whistles
2. Arm overhead: athlete enters water; drop arm to side while athlete enters water
3. Arm overhead: athlete returns to backstroke start position
4. Arm moves to shoulder level: signal to "take your mark"
5. Arm moves to side of body: starting signal



Modification for Athletes with Physical Disabilities

Starting

- May take longer to assume their starting position.
- May have difficulty holding the starting platform or pool end for a start.
- May need assistance from someone on the deck to maintain a starting position.
- May use a modified starting position on the blocks, deck, or in the water.
- Shall use a forward start for freestyle, breaststroke, and butterfly. The referee may allow the following modifications:
 - The athlete may start from a sitting position on the block or on the deck as long as they make contact with the starting platform. A towel may be placed on the block to avoid abrasions.
 - The athlete may assume a starting position in the water, with or without assistance. The assistant or coach may help with stability but not provide any forward momentum for the athlete.
 - If the athlete cannot use a hand and/or foot to maintain contact with the wall, some other part of the body may be used.
 - For breaststroke and butterfly, after the start and after each turn, an athlete who is unable to push off with the leg(s) may perform one arm stroke that does not need to be simultaneous or on the horizontal plane to attain the breast position.



1. Sitting on block or deck
2. Starting from pool deck
3. Towel on block
4. Assisted in the water forward start
5. Unassisted in the water forward start
6. Assisted on block or deck forward start

Stroke/Kick:

- In judging the stroke or kick of an athlete with a physical disability, the referee and stroke & turn judge should follow the general rule that if a part of the body is absent or cannot be used, it is not judged; if it is used during the stroke or kick, it should be judged in accordance with the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations. Judgements should be made based on the actual rule, not on the athlete's technique. For example, the breaststroke athlete with one arm or leg shorter than the other, may have a non-symmetrical stroke or kick, but as long as the arm or leg action is simultaneous, it would meet that portion of the rule.
- No flotation devices should be permitted.

Turn/Finishes:

- Touches shall be judged in the same manner as strokes and kicks, on the basis of the arm(s) and/or hand(s) that the athlete can use. In breaststroke and butterfly events, the competitor must reach forward as if attempting a simultaneous two hand touch. When an athlete has a different arm length, only the longer arm must touch the wall, but both arms must be stretched forward simultaneously.
- Athletes with no arms or with upper limbs too short to stretch above the head may touch the wall with any part of the upper body.

Relays:

- Some athletes may also need additional time to exit the pool. Relay athletes who cannot exit the water immediately may be allowed to remain in the lane until all relays have finished so long as they do not interfere with the other athletes or the timing equipment.



Coaching

Practice Accommodations

- Use equipment such as fins or paddles for a portion of the practice to help athletes with disabilities make intervals (different types of fins to accommodate the athlete's disability, see page 13).
- Modify the distance athletes with disabilities swim, but keep the same interval as the team.
- Spend an extra 10 to 15 minutes before or after practice developing ideal technique.
- Challenge the athlete like you would the rest of the team.
- Make the athlete as independent as possible.
- During drills, ensure the athletes are concentrating on the drill and not on keeping up with other athletes.



Get to know all athletes on the team

- Learn about the athlete's reasons for swimming.
- Observe the athlete's technical skills, fitness levels, communication skills, and maturity level.
- When appropriate, learn about the athlete's disability and ask the athlete or parents to teach you.

Have the same expectations

- Include the athlete with a disability in all instruction and activities, making modifications as needed.
- Expect the athlete with a disability to comply with all the expectations regarding team policies and meet participation.
- Challenge the athlete with a disability to perform in practices and meets just as you challenge athletes without disabilities.

Use the same principles of stroke technique and training

- Use experimentation and coaching expertise to determine:
 - best head/body positions
 - effective propulsion techniques
 - ways to decrease resistance
- Use the same principles of training for athletes with disabilities as you do for athletes without disabilities (i.e. improving fitness, energy systems, etc.).
- Pay attention to every swimmer.
- Provide coaching to every swimmer.
- Make efforts to ensure the safety of every swimmer.



Effective Communication

Facilitate understanding, friendships, and sportsmanship

- Set an example of inclusion and understanding.
- Team meetings should include topics such as inclusion, respect, responsibility, and sportsmanship.

Use a variety of communication methods

- Encourage communication between athletes with disabilities and athletes without disabilities.
- It is common that if a person doesn't understand the disability they will ignore it or ignore the person. Encourage healthy conversation and open and honest dialogue.
- Verbal communication refers to speaking and sign language.
- Non-verbal communication includes gestures, demonstrations, signage/white boards, etc.
- Talk, listen, and observe.
- Check for understanding.
- When appropriate, ask teammates to help each other understand and follow coaching instructions.

Disability

Communication Cues

Physical Disabilities

Move/kneel so that you are at the athlete's eye level, especially when speaking with an athlete who uses a wheelchair or athletes with short stature.

Vision Impairments

Use rich verbal descriptions.

Physically assist athletes to achieve correct technique with verbal permission.

Hearing Impairments

Face the athlete.

Use normal voice.

Use gestures or signs.

Use written instructions and have athletes read the workout from a whiteboard before and during practice.

Hire an interpreter for meets and large events.

Sharing team information with families

- Be aware of communication preferences of athletes and their families.
- Use multiple methods of communication when disseminating information such as team policies, practice schedules, and meet announcements. Make sure that all resources are accessible (written handouts, club website, social networking websites).

Develop consistency across coaching

- Communicate regularly with coaching staff to avoid athlete frustration that often occurs when coaches are not on the same page.

COMPETITION MODELS

Every state is different in its decision to offer specific events. The majority allow athletes to compete in any event offered. Vision loss could be included within any event as long as there is the ability to “tap” the athlete when they are close to the turn or finish end of the pool. The following are examples of some of the state high school associations offering adapted swimming for students with physical disabilities.

State State Best Practices

- Alabama** Alabama allows adapted athletes to compete in 50 free, 100 free, 100 back, and 100 breast. They use 3 classifications: impairments in all 4 limbs, impairment in lower limbs and para ambulatory.
- Illinois** Illinois allows an athlete with a disability to compete in the 50, 100, and 200 freestyle and the 100 yard breaststroke.
- Michigan** Schools need to accommodate individuals with disabilities to the extent that reasonable accommodations can be made that won't alter the essential elements of the sport, increase the injury to the other participants or themselves and/or provide the student athlete with an unfair advantage.
- Missouri** If the athlete needs to use equipment or specific accommodations they must request this to the principal in advance.



Athletes Must

- Have a permanent disability.
- A record on file with the school.
- Have a verification of the disability.
- Demonstrate that they are water safe.

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Equal Access/Participation Model

Athletes compete at dual, group, and at the state level, but do not deliver points to their team to win a meet.

- Athletes invited to the state meet based on a timed final or field event performances.
- Athletes do not achieve points but do receive medals and can set state records.



Scoring Model

- Athletes achieve swimming high school letters through scoring points.
- Athlete can score points for the team.
- Athlete can score points at state, receive medals and set state records.
- Points given based on the total number of participants.
- The one plus one — a single athlete with a disability would receive a point (or the number determined by the state) and a medal.
- Scoring would be based on the system used by the state in the traditional model if full heats exist.

Advancement to the State Championship

1. Ranking list: top eight athletes invited to the state meet
2. Eligible athletes apply to be part of the team and selection is based on past performance
3. Meet a qualifying standard during the course of the season. Standards could be based on the qualifying times of athletes without disabilities compared to the percentage of the FINA World Rankings and then use the same percentage to compare to the IPC World Rankings to derive a Paralympic eligible qualifying time. This would require all athletes to have a US Para Classification, which may not be attainable.

Determination of Team Championships

4. A team trophy given to non-disabled teams and one for the combined scores of the disabled athletes and the non-disabled athletes from the same school.
5. If the points scored by an athlete with a disability enables their team to tie or exceed the highest team point total of another team(s) then the team with an athlete with a disability will be declared a co-champion and the other team(s) without the athlete with a disability will be declared the outright champion. This applies to the runner-up position as well as the regular season, district, regional, and state meet.
6. Traditional system of awarding team trophies based on the combination of non-disabled and athlete with a disability.

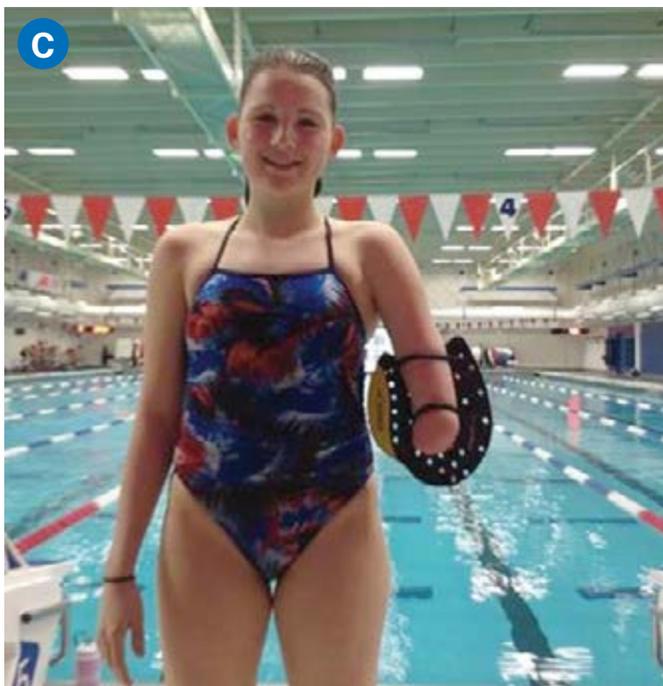
Best Practices

- Wear school uniform.
- Meet high school eligibility requirements.
- Designate a set number of competitions that an athlete with a disability must compete in to be eligible to advance to state competitions.

EQUIPMENT

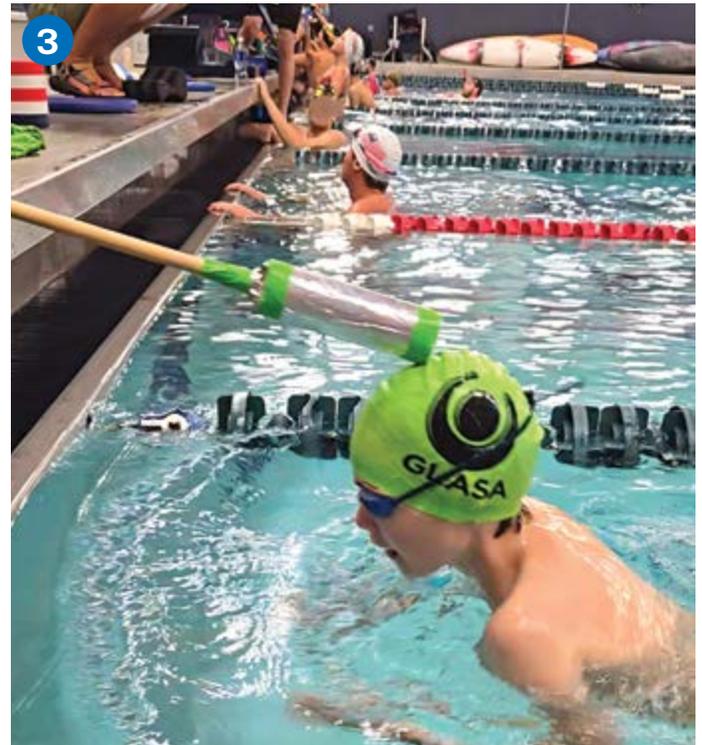
Fins & Paddles

Different types of fins or paddles can be used to accommodate an athlete's impairment. Figures A, B, and C.



Tappers

"Tappers" are used to let the athlete with a visual impairment know when to make the turn. Figures 1-3.



GROUPINGS

The groupings presented here are suggested ways to create competition classes for athletes with disabilities. In order to not be confused with the national and international classification systems, we use the term groupings for school-based sport. Many states have implemented their own groupings system.

This is one suggested example:

Group 1: Non-ambulatory (wheelchair user): limited use of all four extremities

Group 2: Dwarfism/short stature, multiple limb differences, ambulatory with assistance, can be a wheelchair user with high functioning upper body.

Group 3: Single limb difference, visual impairments, intellectual disability, ambulatory without significant assistance.



Classification

Athletes with a disability have impairment(s) that may lead to competitive disadvantage in sport. Classification is the process by which athletes are assessed relative to the impact of impairment on their ability to compete in a specific sport. Within the classification system, criteria are put in place to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for athletes without a disability.

Classification is sport specific. Each sport has established groups, call sport classes, to group athletes for competition based on activity limitation for that sport. The international classification system for individual sports can be viewed online at: Paralympic.org/classification. Most IPC classification systems are not appropriate (too detailed) for a high school setting. It is suggested to modify to simplified / grouped classes such as sitting (wheelchair athletes), visually impaired, and ambulatory.

SAFETY

Student athletes with disabilities do not represent a higher level of liability risk or risk management concern than student athletes without disabilities. With proper planning and contingencies, student athletes with disabilities can seamlessly integrate into the dynamics of an interscholastic team. Individualized assessments can help assess or identify any potential safety concerns.

Safety Resources

Ensuring athlete safety is a priority. Through education, resources, and training, members of the sport community can recognize, reduce, and respond to misconduct in sport. Please refer to the following resources for more information.

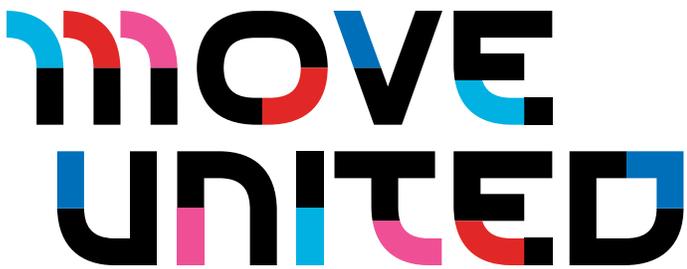
What is SafeSport?

<https://uscenterforsafesport.org>



RESOURCES

USA Swimming	usaswimming.org/resource-center/diversity-equity-inclusion
USA Swimming Rule Book	usaswimming.org/about-usas/governance/rules-policies
ASA: The Home of Aquatic Sports in England	usaswimming.org/docs/default-source/governance/governance-lsc-website/rules_policies/rulebook
Club Finder	usaswimming.org/find-a-team
U.S. Paralympics Swimming	Athletes: usparaswimming.org Officials: usparaswimming.org/officials Coaches: usparaswimming.org/coachi
World Para Swimming Rulebook	paralympic.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/WPS%20Rules%20and%20Regulations_April%202024_0.pdf



MISSION

Move United uses the power of sport to push what's possible for people with disabilities, confronting ignorance, fueling conversation, and inciting action that leads us to a world where everyone's included.

VISION

Move United's vision is that every person, regardless of ability, has an equal opportunity to participate in sports and recreation in their community. Our mission is to provide national leadership and opportunities for individuals with disabilities to develop independence, confidence, and fitness through participation in community sports, including competition, recreation and educational programs.

Local Contact

Local adaptive sport organization
may input contact info here.

**For more information,
visit moveunitedsport.org**