

# The Voice

Fall 2007

Official Publication of the New York State Recreation and Park Society, Inc.

## Conservation in Our Parks

### HIGHLIGHTS

**Follow These Leaders**

Page 7

**In the News...  
Conservation in  
Our Parks**

page 10

**The Great  
Accessible Outdoors**

page 11

**Establishing  
Environments for  
Creativity**

Page 15

**Recreation Customer  
Service Tips**

Page 16

**Environmental  
Protection Bill Signed**

Page 24

Also...

**Winners of  
Affiliate Awards**

Page 31

**Executive Board  
Nominations**

Page 39



NYSRPS, Inc.  
Saratoga Spa State Park  
19 Roosevelt Dr., Suite 200  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

# Tips for Successful Inclusion of people



# with Diverse Behaviors

Imagine that you are experiencing a migraine headache and that your recreation staff person is directing you to join a game of Dodge Ball. Because you have a disability, perhaps autism or mental retardation, you are unable to communicate your intense pain and so you appear to be “non-compliant” or having “obstinate behaviors” when you refuse to enter the gym. While you try to rest on the floor outside the gym, two staff members discuss your lack of participation and describe you as being “difficult.”

Professionals who have little experience dealing with individuals with disabilities and diverse behaviors can be significantly challenged by the realities of inclusion. They find themselves unprepared to integrate people with behavioral issues in their recreation programs. Concerns about risk-management, and heightened anxiety can lead to the harmful consequences of excluding people from services.

First and foremost, all behavior should be viewed as a form of communication. The initial step in supporting people who exhibit atypical behaviors is identifying whether or not their behavior is truly disruptive or poses a safety concern. An individual with ADHD may have difficulty sitting for long periods of time, and therefore may frequently get up to use the bathroom or get a drink of water. A person with autism may be uncomfortable participating in large group activities and may wander around the perimeter of the gym. Accepting that an individual's participation may vary or knowing that certain activities may be over stimulating can change your perception of the event. Behavior that may initially appear to be negative behavior may in fact be the person self-regulating their actions and adapting to their environment. If the behavior is not interfering with the nature of an activity, there may be no reason to identify the behavior as problematic.

Consider that there are several reasons someone may be exhibiting negative behaviors. Examples include:

**Anxiety or fear** – Many people have situations that cause anxiety. Individuals with cognitive impairments may have difficulty processing new situations or connecting with new people. Those with sensory issues, such as sensitivity to loud noises, bright lights

and crowding may exhibit negative conduct when confronted with those situations. Their behavior may clearly be communicating their anxiety and fear.

**Illness or pain** – There is a great deal of research that examines the high incidence of chronic health problems among people with disabilities. This is compounded for those individuals who do not have verbal communication skills. It is also important to be aware that many medications may have side effects that may impact a person's level of engagement.

**Fatigue** – As with any of us, participation in an activity can be difficult when a person is tired. Remember that many activities, such as an after-school youth program occur at the end of what can be considered a very long day.

In addition to identifying possible causes of negative behavior, there are several strategies that will allow you to structure your programs and environments to prevent behavior problems. Tips include:

1. Avoid unstructured time or “down time” without options that can result in boredom, or engaging in inappropriate ways of entertaining themselves.

**STRATEGY:** Develop well planned activities that fill the entire schedule. Offer suggestions or choices for “free time” so that people feel they have structure. Always have back-up plans in the event that an activity falls through.

2. Avoid activities that do not challenge, are uninteresting, or that are not age-appropriate. These situations may result in boredom, lack of participation or non-compliance.

**STRATEGY:** Plan a variety of activities that are relevant to the individual's age, interests and abilities. Involving participants in the planning of activities will assist you in identifying recreation that is meaningful to your participants.

3. Avoid activities that do not provide opportunities for success that could potentially result in low self-esteem or frustration.

**STRATEGY:** Analyze plans in advance to identify inherent characteristics of the activity, i.e. what the participants are required to do, and make changes or accommodations accordingly. For example, if a child uses a wheelchair and kickball requires running of the bases, participants might have a designated runner

or a teammate push the person in his/her wheelchair.

4. Avoid sudden changes in routine that may result in insecurity, resistance or rebellion.

**STRATEGY:** Have activities and schedules clearly posted to provide opportunities to plan for their day. For some people, a picture board schedule is particularly useful. Alert people ahead of time when changes are about to occur, such as telling people that they have 10 or 5 minutes left before an activity ends. When sudden changes are necessary, be specific about the change and when possible, offer choices in lieu of the planned activity.

5. Be aware of the effects of highly stimulating environments such as sensitivity to loud noises, crowded spaces, bright or flashing lights, odors, and the risk of flight.

**STRATEGY:** Identify potential sensory issues before you begin planning activities. A smaller group size may accommodate crowding or over-stimulation issues. Someone with sensitivity to bright lights may have difficulty in a lazer-tag game. (Note that bright or flashing lights may also be a seizure trigger for a person with Epilepsy.)

Knowing an individual's behavior issues is key to optimizing successful participation. As with anyone utilizing your services, ask if accommodations are necessary, and ask about strategies that will successfully support their inclusion in your recreation program. If a person has a written behavior plan, be sure that all staff are aware of the accommodations the plan addresses. Staff training that skillfully prepares everyone to serve all members of the community requires disability awareness, person-first language and accommodations. This objective is essential in all recreation settings.

The central goal of the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center at SUNY Cortland is to enable recreation and tourism professionals to provide opportunities for people of all abilities to enjoy recreation programs, parks, and facilities wherever they choose. This includes technical assistance and training, as well as assessments of recreation programs, parks, and facilities. For more information, contact Laurie Penney McGee, Project Coordinator at (607) 753-4833 or [penneymcgeel@cortland.edu](mailto:penneymcgeel@cortland.edu).