

# WORKING WITH MIXED ABILITIES

*Information supplied by Toni ( Antnz) Burgess, Vertx manager, YMCA central*

## Temperature

When working with people of mixed abilities temperature regulation and control can be compromised due to several factors. For those with spinal conditions; compromised Central Nervous System prevents a client from feeling hot or cold, shivering and sweat production are both compromised. If an able bodied participant feels cold, someone with a spinal injury will be as cold (if not colder) and does not have the central nervous system response to generate heat (shivering). If an able bodied participant feels hot, someone with a spinal injury will also be hot and does not have the central nervous system response to cool (sweating). Therefore it is much easier to keep temperate regulated rather than trying to heat or cool a person. In hotter situations it is a good idea to keep a spray bottle with water around to simulate sweat.

With amputees the reduction of skin surface area can affect their temperature regulation.

## Working at Height

When working with spinal injured at height it is important to ensure that there is not pressure/weight being suspended by the lesion. Therefore it is often important to ensure a full bodied or a chest and sit harness combination is used. When using harnesses with those with sensation loss it is important not to have areas of rubbing of the harness to the skin as this can cause pressure areas. If needed it is a good idea to pad out any areas of rubbing with closed cell foam or similar. Always ensure that are systems in place to disengage the client from the system, (for example a way to lower someone who is doing rope ascending).

When working with amputees with prosthetics it is important to ensure that the prosthetic is secured to the client.

When working with those with visual impairments it is important to have clear communication on where foot and hand placements are made, rates of descent and height.

When working with those with hearing impairments PRIOR to an activity communication methods must be clearly established and outlined to participants (i.e. tug on rope systems).

### Working around/in water

With spinal injured clients, due to muscle loss and inability to control all limbs can make working in and around water problematic. The muscle loss reduces floatation potential of the participant; therefore ensure that adequate PFDs are used. It is recommended that those with a spinal injury above T4 that a PFD that will turn a participant onto their back is used. It is also recommended that an assigned person is used to rescue/support a participant with a spinal injury. This needs to be arranged prior to departure. Often kayak/canoe seats may need additional padding to prevent pressure areas.

It is often a good idea to have a floatation device is attached to prosthetic limbs.

### Skin & Stump Care

Skin and stump care are important aspects of running activities with those of mixed abilities. Grazes and pressure areas need to be avoided as much as possible with those with spinal injuries. Ensuring padding in those areas is key. Stumps must be kept dry as much as possible and regular checks need to be maintained.