

Welcoming New and Returning Volunteers and Players to the New Adaptive Tennis Season

As many of us welcome new and returning players and volunteers this fall, there are several “going above and beyond” gestures you may consider that might help your program run smoothly. Especially if you had a COVID hiatus, rusty but ready volunteers, players, and family may benefit from a little extra TLC.

- **Volunteer orientation/refreshers** Volunteers are there because they want to help, belong to a community, and feel productive. It may be a great idea to host a volunteer-only short orientation/training in which you can consider:
 - Doing a quick team-building game or activity on the court to get to know each other
 - Review of the lesson flow (can do a mock lesson and role play)
 - Go over the role of the volunteers and how they may be assigned to tasks
 - When to call for the professional’s attention
 - How to interact with the caregivers and parents
 - Discussion on concerns and questionsVolunteers like to feel like a part of the team. Create a strong team behind you that can support you and the players throughout the season.
- **Player/caregiver/parent orientation** Have you had challenges with anxious parents trying to help their children during the lessons? It can be very hard for the parents and caregivers to sit away from the court sometimes. Discussing the following may help manage the parents and caregivers in a very supportive way:
 - Introduction of the professionals and meet and greet
 - Introduce them to the session goals, lesson flow, and how individuals’ needs may be accommodated
 - Clarify the volunteers and their roles
 - Go over times and ways they can communicate with the professional. Give them several different ways such as in-person and email
 - Share some success stories from past sessions and participants. Maybe ask a returning player’s family to share their experience.

Parents can be the best and biggest supporters of the program, while they can also be very challenging if they are not happy. Communication, openness, and clear boundaries can only help your relationships with the family and caregivers.

- Hand out written rules and guidelines of the facility and program
 - Attendance and how to communicate absence
 - Universal access (if required) if the entrance/bathroom is gender specific
 - Any changes in rules due to COVID (hand wash before and after may be a good idea)
 - Expectation of player behavior and conduct on the court
 - Brief bio of the tennis professional and welcome message

The power of handouts serves many purposes: It makes the rules and expectations concrete, and at the same time, some notes here and there make family and players feel like they received some solid communications. Consider a small handout to be given to the player throughout the lessons, just reviewing some rules, upcoming skills, and task introductions.

Above all, remember tennis is a game and the most important part of a game is to have FUN!