



Magical Sports Programs

Make Your Own, A Step-by-Step Manual

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We learned quickly that the magic wasn't just in the sport, it was in the relationship. A one-to-one coach-to-participant model changed everything.



Hi!

We're Ava and Sophia, and we kicked off the first Magical Sports Program with our favorite sport, tennis, for neurodivergent kids at our local Magical Bridge Playground. What started as a love for the game turned into one of the most rewarding experiences of our lives. This guide is filled with what we learned along the way, but you can swap tennis for any sport you are passionate about. We hope it inspires you to start something of your own and create a place where everyone feels welcome and included. – *Ava & Sophia*

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01

Getting Started

Magical Bridge was founded to create spaces where people of all ages and abilities can experience the magic of play without barriers. Our playgrounds are designed with accessibility, kindness, and inclusion at the heart, and our programs carry that same spirit into the community. By starting a Magical Sports Program, you are helping extend this mission beyond the playground, creating opportunities for connection, joy, and lifelong skills through the power of inclusive sports.

ALL AGES. ALL ABILITIES. ALL WELCOME.

PURPOSE

Sports do more than improve physical fitness. They boost mental well-being, build teamwork, communication, perseverance, and give participants a chance to try something new in a supportive space. Too often, people with developmental or cognitive differences are left out of recreational opportunities. Whether due to inaccessible environments, limited training, or a lack of one-on-one support, they're unable to fully participate in programs others take for granted. Our goal is to change that, by building experiences where everyone feels welcomed.

Why One-to-One Matters

One-to-one pairing is the foundation of a Magical Sports Program.

This model builds trust, eases anxiety, fosters connection, and ensures each participant has a partner by their side to guide, support, and cheer them on.

STEP ONE

01 GETTING STARTED

PICK YOUR SPORT

Choose a sport you love. You'll be doing it a lot, so your enthusiasm matters. Think about how easy it is to teach, what materials you'll need, and what kind of space is required.

FIND YOUR PEOPLE - Design for One-on-One Support

Build your program around a one-to-one coach-to-participant ratio. This is not an optional bonus, it's the single most important part of what makes these programs work. When each participant has a Team Coach, they can build trust, engage at their own pace, and feel safe trying new things.

A Partner

While it's not required, it's helpful to have someone to share planning, set-up, and communication.

A Dedicated Adult *(If you're a teenager)*

An adult advisor can help with booking locations, securing equipment, and easing parent concerns.

Your Team Coaches

Friends, classmates, or fellow sport teammates. Make sure they know they don't need to be great at the sport, just willing to help.

01 GETTING STARTED

CHOOSE A TIME AND LOCATION

Every community is a little different, so it helps to ask future participants what times and locations feel most accessible to them. Weekends often work well for both high school volunteers and participants, but the best way to know is to send out a quick survey and let your group guide the plan. Remember, you can run a Magical Bridge program anywhere. Even if you don't have a Magical Bridge Playground nearby, you can bring the spirit of kindness, inclusion, and play to your own school or community.



When we launched the first Magical Tennis Program, we started by creating a *Magical Bridge Club* at our school. With the help of our advisor, we recruited volunteers, onboarded coaches, and kept everything organized. Starting the club made it so much easier to get our program off the ground, and you can learn how to do the same in the *Magical Clubs Manual!*" – Ava & Sophia

02

Setting up



STEP TWO

03 SETTING UP

GET YOUR EQUIPMENT

Some participants won't have their own gear, and that's completely okay. Ask about equipment needs when they sign up so you can plan ahead. Reassure them that not having gear will never be a barrier to playing, you'll help make sure everyone has what they need to fully join in.

WAYS TO GET WHAT YOU NEED

Fundraise

Fundraise through your club, bake sales, or an online campaign, making sure people know exactly what their contribution will support.

Use What You Have

Borrow from friends, family, or teammates who may have extra gear sitting at home that they're happy to share.

Partner with Local Businesses

Ask local businesses or schools to donate or lend equipment, and be sure to thank them publicly for their support.

03 SETTING UP

ORGANIZE YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Make sure every volunteer **signs up as a Kindness Ambassador** so they feel part of the program from the start. Before your first session, **hold a short training** to walk everyone through the flow, share expectations, and answer questions. Keep communication simple by **setting up a group chat** for quick updates, and use an attendance form to track availability so you're never short on support. Aim for one coach per participant. If that's not possible, prioritize pairing volunteers with participants who are new, anxious, or benefit most from individual support. You'll see the difference, and so will families.

Hi!

Once our club was up and running, we realized we needed more than just people, we needed gear. We borrowed some rackets, fundraised for the rest, and even received a few donations from a local sports shop. Having what we needed ready to go made the first day so much less stressful, and all we had to focus on was making it fun. – *Ava & Sophia*



STEP TWO

03 SETTING UP

PLAN YOUR SESSIONS

A consistent plan helps participants feel comfortable and know what to expect, which is especially important for those who thrive on predictability. Keeping a familiar structure allows participants to focus on the fun and skill-building rather than worrying about what's next. At the same time, offering choices within each segment ensures that everyone can participate in a way that feels right for them.



03 SETTING UP

Coaches arrive early for set-up and name tags

Arriving early creates a calm, welcoming space. Name tags help with introductions, memory, and social comfort.

Pro Tip

Easy to read name tags

Welcome kids and match them with coaches

We match each participant with their own dedicated coach at the very beginning of each session.

Pro Tip

Greet with a choice — a wave, handshake, or high-five.

Warm-up (laps, stretches, fun movement)

Warm-ups prepare bodies and minds. Offer options like walking instead of running or seated stretches to meet different needs.

Pro Tip

Add music or games to create structure and smooth transitions.

Skill practice (throwing, catching, basic techniques)

Break skills into small, clear steps. Use verbal, visual, and hands-on demonstrations.

Pro Tip

Provide adaptive equipment and offer both beginner and advanced variations.

Play time (games or modified match play)

Make it engaging for all with smaller teams, shorter play times, or rule tweaks.

Pro Tip

Let participants help choose the game to boost ownership and excitement.

Group game to end (tag, relay races, etc.)

End with a fun, inclusive game so everyone leaves with a positive memory.

Pro Tip

Games where everyone finishes together, so no one feels left out.

03

Growing Your Program



Hi! I'M A
KINDNESS
AMBASSADOR

STEP THREE

03 GROWING YOUR PROGRAM

GET THE WORD OUT

Get your events, projects, and programs noticed. Publicity is how you build excitement, attract new members, and inspire people to participate. Every announcement, post, or flyer is a chance to show what your club is all about.

HOW TO PUBLICIZE

Use social media

Create an Instagram account, follow classmates, and post updates, event reminders, and photos in stories, posts, or reels.

Network

Ask friends, family, and classmates to share your events. Word of mouth works.

Collaborate

Partner with other clubs to cross-promote and grow your audience.

Post flyers

Place eye-catching posters in high-traffic areas (with school approval).

Use announcements

Submit details to your school's daily announcements, newsletter, or website.

03 GROWING YOUR PROGRAM

YOUR FUNDRAISING GAME PLAN

Support your programs, cover costs, and give back to your community. Fundraising not only helps you reach your goals, it also brings people together and builds excitement around your club's mission.

HOW TO FUNDRAISE

Join school fundraising events

Sell goods at fairs or themed events when student turnout is high.

Host a bake sale

Package and decorate treats, and let buyers know proceeds go to a good cause.

Sell at sports games

Offer seasonal snacks like hot chocolate or warm cookies at football, basketball, or baseball games.



PRO TIP
Publicity and fundraising go hand-in-hand. Promote your fundraisers just like you would any other event.

**Together, we can make
every community a place
where everyone belongs.**



04

Running Sessions



STEP FOUR

04 RUNNING SESSIONS

FROM START TO SMILES

A good session has a rhythm, a warm-up, skill-building, active play, cool down and a closing activity that leaves everyone smiling. Use variety to keep it fresh, and be ready to adapt for different abilities, moods, and group sizes.

1

Warm-up

- Short, playful movement games (*Follow the Leader, Freeze Dance*)
- Relay-style activities at each person's own pace
- Partner stretches to encourage connection

2

Focus on one to two skills

- Break skills into small, clear steps
- Use stations so participants can rotate and practice
- Offer challenges for different levels

3

Build skills into play

- Themed games that sneak in skill practice
- Cooperative challenges with a shared goal
- Fun variations on classic games (*smaller fields, softer balls, time limits*)

04 RUNNING SESSIONS

4

Keep everyone engaged

- Switch activities every 5–10 minutes
- Rotate partners to build social comfort
- Let participants “choose their challenge”

5

End on a high note

- Group game or song that everyone loves
- Quick shout-outs to acknowledge participants
- Ask a fun wrap-up question

PRO TIP

Always take regular water breaks and offer water to participants. Keep backup games ready in case you need to shift gears.

THINGS TO ALWAYS HAVE ON HAND

Extra water bottles or a refill station

First aid kit (bandages, antiseptic wipes, ice packs)

Hand sanitizer

Small towels

Kindness Ambassador vests/shirts

Emergency contact list for participants

Fully charged cell phone

Adult helper/advisor

Directions to nearest hospital or urgent care

Sunscreen and shade options for outdoor play

STEP FOUR

04 RUNNING SESSIONS

KEEPING THE MAGIC GOING

Your program doesn't stop at the last game of the day, it grows, evolves, and keeps bringing joy week after week. Here's how to keep the spirit of Magical Sports alive so every session feels fresh, fun, and full of connection.

Check In Regularly

Ask for feedback from participants, families, and volunteers. A quick conversation or short survey can reveal what's working and where you can improve.

Mix Things Up

Introduce new games, skill challenges, or themed days to keep interest high. Even small changes can spark new excitement.

Celebrate Milestones

Mark your wins! A participant mastering a new skill, your group reaching a certain number of sessions, or hosting your first community event.

Support Your Volunteers

Show appreciation with thank-you notes, social media shout-outs, or small treats after sessions. Happy, recognized volunteers are more likely to stay committed.



When we were younger, the playground taught us what inclusion and kindness really mean. Those lessons stayed with us as we grew, and we wanted to bring that same spirit into something we loved, sports. Through our tennis program, we have watched friendships grow, confidence shine, and families connect in ways we never expected. *That is the real magic.* If you are thinking about starting your own program, do it. You will create a place where everyone belongs and change more lives than you can imagine, including your own. – *Ava & Sophia*