Frequently Asked Questions for Families New to ODS

Welcome to Open Door Sports (ODS)! We are excited that you are considering joining our community.

ODS provides inclusive sports and recreational opportunities for children and young adults with disabilities, creating a place where participants can build skills, confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging.

If you are new to ODS, we know you may have questions about how our programs work, whether your child will be a good fit, and what to expect. We hope this FAQ helps you feel comfortable taking that first step.

What is Open Door Sports?

Open Door Sports is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing sports and recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Our programs are designed to meet participants where they are — whether they are trying a sport for the first time, developing new skills, or simply looking for a fun way to be active and connect with others.

We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to play, participate, and belong.

Who can participate in ODS programs? How old does my child need to be?

ODS serves children and young adults with disabilities and a wide range of abilities and support needs. Our Youth Programs serve kids ages 6 and up, with most kids finding the easiest transition to play when they are ages 7 or 8. Our Young Adult Programs serve individuals ages 16 to 26.

Our programs are intentionally designed to be inclusive, and participants do not need to be highly skilled or experienced athletes to participate.

If you aren't sure whether a particular program is right for your child, please reach out to us. We are happy to help you find a good fit.

Does my child need to be athletic or have experience playing the sport?

Absolutely not!

Many of our participants are trying a sport for the first time. Our goal is not to create elite athletes — it is to create opportunities for participants to learn, move, have fun, and experience the joy of being part of a team.

Activities are adapted as needed so that participants can participate at their own level.

What types of sports and activities does ODS offer?

ODS offers a variety of sports and recreational programs throughout the year. Offerings vary by season but may include:

- Soccer
- Basketball
- Baseball/T-ball
- Flag football

- Tennis
- Golf
- Bocce
- Pickleball
- Yoga
- Special events and community experiences

We also offer our Changemaker Club, which provides opportunities for participants to explore activities and experiences outside of traditional sports.

What is the Changemaker Club?

The Changemaker Club provides opportunities for ODS participants to participate in fun, inclusive social and recreational experiences in the community.

Activities may include cooking, art, special sporting events, outdoor activities, and other unique experiences.

These programs are designed to help participants build friendships, independence, confidence, and connections beyond the playing field.

What is a Peer Buddy?

A Peer Buddy is typically a middle or high school student who volunteers to participate alongside and support an ODS athlete as they learn a new sport.

Peer Buddies may help participants learn skills, participate in activities, navigate a new experience, and — perhaps most importantly — make a friend.

ODS believes strongly in creating opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities to learn and grow together.

Will my child have a one-on-one buddy?

In our Youth Programs, players have either one or two peer buddies working with them, depending on the needs and age of the player.

ODS Young Adult Programs have a more blended structure, with high school peers assisting the group rather than working with individual players.

When registering, families should provide information about their child's strengths, support needs, communication style, and any accommodations that may help them have a successful experience.

What if my child has significant support needs?

We welcome families to talk with us about their child's individual needs.

Our goal is to create successful experiences for participants with a wide range of abilities. However, every program and facility is different, so we may need to discuss whether a particular activity and venue can safely and appropriately accommodate your child's needs.

At ODS, the safety of every participant is our first priority and is considered in all discussions regarding participation.

Does a parent or caregiver need to stay during the program?

Typically, no, but it depends on the program and the participant.

The majority of ODS programs are designed for participants to attend independently. However, we may encourage a parent or caregiver to remain on site to help give us the best chance of a successful experience.

Program-specific information will be provided during registration.

What should I tell ODS about my child?

We encourage families to share anything that will help our staff and volunteers better understand and support their child.

This may include:

- Communication preferences
- Sensory considerations
- Behavioral or emotional supports
- Mobility needs
- Assistive equipment
- Medical or safety considerations relevant to participation
- How your child best learns new skills
- Things your child enjoys
- Strategies that help your child feel comfortable and successful

There is no such thing as "too much information" when it comes to helping us get to know your child.

What if my child doesn't want to participate when we arrive?

That's okay!

New environments, people, and activities can sometimes feel overwhelming. Our coaches and volunteers will do their best to help participants feel comfortable without forcing them to participate.

Sometimes the first step is simply watching, meeting the coaches, or trying one small activity. They will do this with a Peer Buddy beside them.

We encourage families to give their child time to become comfortable.

What if my child has a difficult day?

We understand that not every day will be perfect.

Our goal is to create a supportive environment where participants can have good days, challenging days, and everything in between.

If your child is struggling during a program, our staff will work with you to determine the best way to support them while they are with us.

How do I register for an ODS program?

Registration information is posted through ODS communications and on the ODS website on the Programs page, and then on either the Youth Program page or the Young Adult Program page.

Programs may have limited capacity, so we encourage families to register as early as possible.

ODS will offer a waitlist if programs fill before you are able to register.

How much do ODS programs cost?

All ODS programs are free of charge. ODS works hard to keep programs accessible to families and asks those families who are financially able to donate $50–$100 toward the $165 cost ODS incurs for each player in a program.

What should my child wear or bring?

Program-specific information will be provided before each activity.

In general, participants should wear comfortable clothing appropriate for the activity and weather and bring any personal equipment or assistive items they need.

For outdoor activities, we recommend bringing water and dressing appropriately for the conditions.

What if my child has never participated in an inclusive sports program before?

You're in the right place!

You do not need to know the terminology, understand how every program works, or have previous experience. We are here to help you navigate the process.

Is ODS competitive?

The strong majority of ODS programs are not competitive and are focused on participation, skill development, confidence, friendship, and fun rather than winning.

Our Game Day Program is the one exception. It has a game-like structure with teams, referees, rules, and coaches. Players are given numbered jerseys to play, and there is no instruction outside of gentle coaching.

Game Day is designed for our more experienced players, generally middle school-aged and older. The Game Day Program is offered in both soccer and basketball and for both youth and young adults.

Will my child make friends?

We certainly hope so!

Friendship and belonging are a huge part of the ODS experience. Our programs bring together players, peer buddies, coaches, and families who share an interest in sports and recreation.

For many families, the ODS community becomes just as important as the activity itself.

How can parents get involved?

We love parent involvement!

Families can support ODS by volunteering, helping at events, participating in fundraisers, sharing ideas, introducing us to community partners, or simply helping spread the word about ODS.

You don't have to be a sports expert to be part of the ODS community.

What makes ODS different?

At ODS, we believe inclusion means more than simply allowing someone to participate.

We want participants to feel welcomed, valued, challenged, supported, and genuinely part of the team.

We also believe in creating opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities to build relationships and learn from one another.

Our ultimate goal is to create a community where every participant knows: There is a place for me here.

We still have questions. Who can we contact?

Please don't hesitate to reach out to the ODS team with questions about registration, programs, accommodations, or whether an activity might be a good fit for your child.

The best way to reach us is to email info@opendoorsports.org and provide your information. A member of our small but mighty team will get back to you shortly.

Welcome to Open Door Sports — we hope to see you on the field, court, course, or wherever the next ODS adventure takes us!