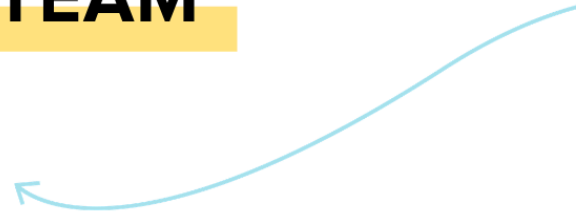




GENERATION SPIRIT⁺



**STARTING YOUR
INCLUSIVE SPIRIT TEAM**



THE GENERATION SPIRIT APPROACH

Generation Spirit was launched in 2009 to empower students across the country to form school spirit teams that include students with and without disabilities. This guide coupled with our free virtual training modules make starting and sustaining a team accessible and rewarding.

Generation Spirit's approach is designed to offer an inclusive, intensive, and immersive experience for all student participants. After all, students with and without disabilities share the same need for a genuine team—one that involves a long-term commitment, a drive to build skills through sustained effort, and a willingness to work collaboratively with teammates over a period of time.

Here's what that looks like:

Inclusive | All team members come to the team on equal footing. At its most basic level, this means that all team members, regardless of ability, are respected and appreciated for their contribution to a diverse team. Students with and without disabilities learn from one another and collaboratively seek solutions to challenges.

More specifically, students without disabilities are never cast in the role of mentors, helpers, or volunteers. Teams reject the assumption that students with disabilities need more help or mentoring than students without disabilities or that students without a disability are better positioned to help than students with a disability.

Intensive | Skill-building and the formation of genuine friendships take time. By meeting and/or practicing weekly and performing throughout the school year, students enjoy a concentrated experience in a group setting for up to eight months of the year. By consistently investing time in practices, activities, and performances, team members create opportunities for growth in self-confidence, communication, and understanding.

Immersive | Because team members are treated as equals and given time and opportunity to grow, participants become highly engaged and identified with their team. Immersion also means that the team becomes fully integrated into a school's sports programming. As inclusive teams perform -- front and center -- they shine a spotlight on the richness that comes from inclusion, ultimately shifting the school's culture to one that values diversity and acceptance.

10 STEPS TO CREATING YOUR TEAM

1. Obtain approval from your school's administrators:

Before you approach any potential participants, start by obtaining the approval and support of your school administration. This guide includes a sample letter you may use to approach your administration about starting your team.

After you send your request in writing, follow up with a face-to-face meeting. Be sure to include any stakeholders who will need to provide input on when and where your new team will perform or appear.

Plan ahead of time what you are going to say. Be ready to clearly articulate why you want to start your new team as well as your short- and long-term goals. Explain how you will recruit participants, where and when practices/meetings will take place, and what the program will look like once it is up and running.

2. Find an adult advisor:

Approach an adult employed by the school who might be interested in serving as your advisor. This might include a coach, teacher, or counselor.

Teams that follow the GenS approach are student-led and student-driven. As such, the advisor's primary role is to mentor and guide the team's student leaders. To the extent possible, the advisor should encourage the team captains to make important decisions about the team and then should facilitate and reinforce those decisions. The advisor will also commit to attend meetings and practices, supervise the team at games and activities, and support communication between team captains, parents, and school administrators.

3. Determine the parameters of your new team:

Once you have identified your adult advisor, define the parameters of your team. You'll want to consider: (1) the age range for your participants; (2) the total number of students your team can accommodate; (3) the frequency, length, and location of practices; and (4) the activities in which your new team will participate.

It is often better to start with a smaller team and then to grow the program once its success is clear.

4. Identify a core group of students with and without disabilities:

When it's time to recruit students to your team, consult the included Recruitment Guide. Be sure to open this opportunity to all students at your school. While it may be helpful to have some students on the team with cheer or dance experience, it is not necessary.

The strongest teams have roughly a 1:1 ratio of students with and without disabilities. When creating your team, select students who are able to fully commit to the program.

After you've recruited team participants, select a few students to serve as primary and secondary team captains. Your captains will lead practices/meetings, communicate information to team members and parents, and work with the school administration to schedule team activities and performances.

5. Hold an informational meeting:

Many teams find it useful to hold an informational meeting for potential participants to discuss the details of the program. It is helpful to provide – in writing – all of the information attendees will need to make an informed decision. Remember to collect contact information from meeting attendees for any follow-up correspondence about the team.

6. Dress for success:

As school spirit ambassadors, it's important for your team to dress the part. In this regard, work to ensure every team member is wearing the same apparel and select styles that are accessible to all team members.

7. Visit our online training library:

Check out the four-part online training series at generationspirit.org/team-resources to learn more about creating a successful, sustainable spirit team. Each video is less than fifteen minutes long and includes helpful guidance and resources to position your student leaders as true social inclusion ambassadors.

8. Practice, practice, practice:

Your new spirit team will need time to master skills and routines. It is helpful to begin meeting/practicing about four weeks before your team is scheduled to perform for the first time.

Safety is always the top priority. If you are stunting or tumbling, be sure to practice on mats and carefully spot teammates while stunting or tumbling. Team members must remain vigilant and focused at all times.

9. Perform with confidence:

Before each game or event, communicate all performance-day details to your team, including what to wear and where/what time to meet. In planning arrival time, build in time for your team to adjust to the crowd and environment ahead of your performance. Performances solidify your role as spirit ambassadors and make a powerful statement: at our school, all students are respected and accepted, regardless of ability.

10. Promote your program:

Don't stop now that your team is a success — make sure that people learn about it! Arrange for a picture of the new team to appear in your school's sports program and yearbook. Consider contacting local newspapers and television stations and tell them about your team's successes.

STUDENT COMMITMENT CONTRACT

By signing this contract, I agree to participate on [TEAM NAME] at events throughout this school year.

I understand that all team members (those with and without disabilities) come to the team on equal footing. Each team member brings unique strengths and unique challenges.

I understand that consistency and continuity on the new team is critically important.

I understand that participation on the team is an honor and a privilege.

I understand that this team exists to promote good sportsmanship, good citizenship, and inclusive school spirit.

I pledge to be present for, punctual, and fully prepared for *all* practices, activities, and games.

I promise to maintain an attitude of enthusiasm, patience, respect, kindness, and cooperation with all members of my team at all times.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

SAMPLE LETTER TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Dear School Administrator,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this proposal. I am a [student/coach/teacher] interested in starting a new spirit team here at our school that includes students with and without disabilities. While I am aware of the numerous clubs and activities that our school offers, I feel that we are lacking in one specific area. I believe the time has come for our school to make more room for students with and without disabilities to come together for sports programming and extracurricular activities. The obvious and ideal first step: create a new spirit team that includes students with and without disabilities. Spirit-raising can be easily adapted to varying skill levels and can easily include both boys and girls.

Students of all abilities should have the opportunity to participate in spirit raising for and with their peers at school events.

Please let me know when we can meet to discuss my proposal.

Sincerely,

SAMPLE REGISTRATION FORM

Contact Information

Name: _____ Birth Date: _____

Parents'/Guardians' Names: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Home Address _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Medical Information

Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Relationship to Student: _____

Insurance Provider: _____ Policy Number: _____

Family Physician: _____ Phone: _____

Allergies: _____

We understand that personal health insurance must cover our son/daughter. We give permission for our child to receive medical attention in the event that we cannot be present or reached.

We give / do not give our permission for photographs of our son/daughter to be reproduced and used in promotional materials.

Parent/Guardian's signature: _____

Date: _____