

Talking with Other Parents about an Athlete with Autism

Sometimes coaches struggle with how to communicate with other parents when questions are asked about an athlete with autism on the team. Here are some ideas for how to handle conversations with other parents:

1. Reinforce the goals of your program/club. Parents may need a reminder that your program is based on participation and the main goals are fun and inclusion.
2. It is VERY important to respect the wishes of the athlete and his/her family regarding disclosing the diagnosis or NOT.
3. Whenever possible, focus on specific situations/behavior and how you will address that as the coach, instead opening the conversation about diagnosis. For example, if the athlete with autism is struggling with taking turns with the puck, talk to other parents about how you will address that situation rather than discussing that athlete more generally.
4. Some parents are very open and happy to share information about their child at parent meetings. This can help for everyone to have a heads-up about what they might see throughout the season and be more patient when challenges might arise.
5. Some parents may not wish to disclose the diagnosis (or you don't even know if the athlete has a diagnosis!) It is important to respect privacy/confidentiality when this is the case.
6. Have a Team Code of Conduct (see Code of Conduct tip sheet) and be familiar with anti-bullying resources (see viaSport's Erase Bullying campaign).
7. When necessary, refer parents back to your sport organization/club if they have complaints.
8. Everyone has a right to participate in sport and recreation in their community. If a parent is resisting inclusion of an athlete with autism, encourage them to be part of the solution; maybe they can help out at practice.

