

# Tips for Including a Child with Autism in an Inclusive Sport/Recreation Program

There are several strategies that can be helpful for including an athlete with autism. Here are a few ideas!

## Collaborate with Parents/the Athlete

- Learn what you can about the athlete: Why the individual is participating in your program, his/her interests, what coaching style works best for the athlete. This can help ensure that as a coach, you are adapting your practice as required to meet the needs of the individual athlete.

## Have a Team Code of Conduct

- Ensure that values such as inclusion, respect, and the right to play are highlighted in your organization's website and in materials for parents and participants. Reference these values as required with athletes and parents to make sure that individuals with diverse abilities are welcomed and supported in your program.

## Build in Social Supports

- Individuals with autism typically struggle with social interactions. They may wish to make friends with teammates but not have adequate social skills. Ensure that athletes with autism are not socially excluded by avoiding coaching practices such as picking teams and partners for practicing skills. Address bullying should it occur. Do not be shy to coach athletes with autism on their social skills (respectfully and away from peers).

## Use Short, Clear Instructions and Visual Cues

- Athletes with autism may struggle with lengthy verbal instructions. Coaches should try to adapt their communication style to use short, clear directions to introduce drills, skills, and rules. In addition, athletes with autism will benefit greatly from visual cues (e.g., targets that show where to aim or marks on the floor that show where to start/stop).

## Provide Lots of Predictability and Clear Expectations

- Individuals with autism thrive in routine. Provide a written schedule for your practice and review it with the group at the start and between activities. Give the group transition cues (e.g., 2 more minutes, then we will move on to scrimmaging).

## Allow for Individualized Skill Development

- Participants with autism may be delayed in their physical literacy. Ensure that each athlete is appropriately challenged. Problem behavior is more likely if activities are too hard or too easy.

## Implement Motivation Strategies/Behaviour

### Support Tools with the Entire Group

- Many individuals with autism will be more engaged when there are motivation tools in place, such as point systems. These tools can be implemented with the entire group.

To learn more, visit [www.canucksautism.ca](http://www.canucksautism.ca).

