

# Conversation Tool Kit: *For Coaches & Recreation Staff*

It can feel overwhelming when a participant on the autism spectrum turns up in your program. You may not be sure of what to do or even where to start! Here are some great questions to ask parents:

## **What does your child like?**

The key to building rapport is finding out about the individual's interests and engaging in those with them (e.g., ask them to tell you about Pokémon) or embed those into your activities (e.g., put a Pokémon target on the wall to practice aiming). Good rapport strongly increases the likelihood that the participant will have a successful experience.

## **What are your goals for your child's participation in this program?**

Many parents are not necessarily looking for their child to progress into competitive sport. Many children on the autism spectrum benefit simply from having the opportunity to participate. Some parents might tell you that their primary goal is to let their child burn off some energy, get some social interaction, or just have fun. If this is the case, take this into account in your coaching/leadership and don't panic if skills are not performed perfectly.

## **Are there one or two behavior support strategies that might be important for me to try in this program?**

Parents might communicate that their child requires predictability and will do better when there is a list of activities for the day that they can follow. They might mention that they need lots of cues when transitions are about to occur (e.g. "Two more minutes, then water break!"). This will help you proactively set the participant up for success.

## **Is someone available to support your child in this program if an extra set of hands is needed?**

Parents may have access to a support worker, sibling/cousin, or they themselves may be open to jumping in and helping if the participant requires additional support. It's a good idea to put this idea on the table early on, in case it becomes necessary once the participant gets started.

## **Is there anything I should avoid when coaching your child?**

Some parents might articulate that their child is very shy and to avoid 'picking partners' as this will likely lead to social exclusion. Other parents might advise that you do not ask the child to do things (e.g., are you ready to run?) but rather present them with a closed choice (e.g., Do you want to do 3 or 4 laps?) It's great to have a heads up on these things early on!

## **Prepare the parent to continue the conversation.**

Make sure that the parent knows that you will be checking in with them periodically as the program continues. You may have additional questions or require additional ideas from the parent. Start the relationship in a collaborative and positive manner and encourage open communication and dialogue.

