

Tips for Creating an Inclusive Sports & Recreation Program

There are several strategies that can be helpful for including an athlete on the autism spectrum. 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, their 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 on the autism spectrum typically struggle with social interactions. They may wish to make friends with teammates but not have adequate social skills. Ensure that Autistic athletes 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 on the spectrum on their social skills (respectfully and away from peers).

Use Short, Clear Instructions and Visual Cues

Autistic athletes 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 on the spectrum 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 on the spectrum 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. "Two more minutes, then we move on to scrimmaging").

Allow for Individualized Skill Development

Autistic participants 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 on the spectrum 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.

