active disability ireland

Factsheet

Autism



The information is provided for **guidance** only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more **inclusive** coach. No two people are the same, as such, please ensure your first step is to speak directly to the person understand their abilities and goals and never assume.

What is Autism?

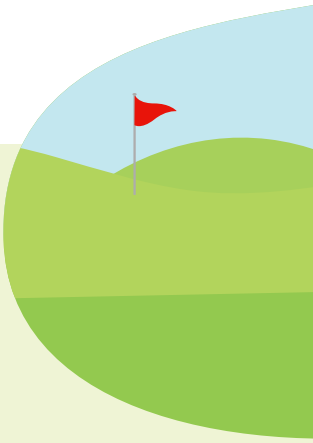
Autism is a natural variation in how people experience, understand, and interact with the world. It is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that can influence communication, social interaction, sensory experiences, and how a person processes information.

Autistic people may think, learn, and experience the world in ways that are different from non-autistic people, and these differences are an important part of human diversity.

Autism is more common than many people realise. Recent estimates 3.3% of the population in Ireland are autistic.

Understanding How Autistic Participants May Experience Activities

- Personal space and belongings may be understood differently; someone may stand closer or use items without intending to cross boundaries.
- Some may prefer to observe, spend time alone, or step back from group activities.
- Predictability is helpful; unexpected changes can feel overwhelming.
- Communication styles vary (e.g. fewer words, direct or creative communication).
- Emotional responses may occur when situations feel confusing or overwhelming.
- Conversations may focus on specific interests and not always follow typical back-and-forth patterns.
- Figurative language or humour may be taken literally. Using clear, direct language helps.
- General instructions may need to be specific and clear.
- Attention may shift based on interest or the environment.
- Movement and coordination may look different from person to person.



Social Communication

Autistic people may experience differences in:

- Understanding social expectations, such as how friendships or group interactions typically work
- Recognising or interpreting other people's emotions, which can sometimes be misunderstood as a lack of empathy
- Social preferences, with some autistic people choosing to spend more time alone
- How they connect with others, which may sometimes come across as distant or less expressive
- Seeking comfort or support, as some may do this in less typical ways
- Expressing feelings, needs, or emotions, which can sometimes lead to behaviours that others may not immediately understand
- Communication styles, including not using speech, using language in unique ways, repeating words or phrases (echolalia), or mixing up pronouns
- Understanding humour, sarcasm, or implied meaning
- Interpreting common phrases or sayings, which may be taken literally

4. Be Aware of Sensory Needs

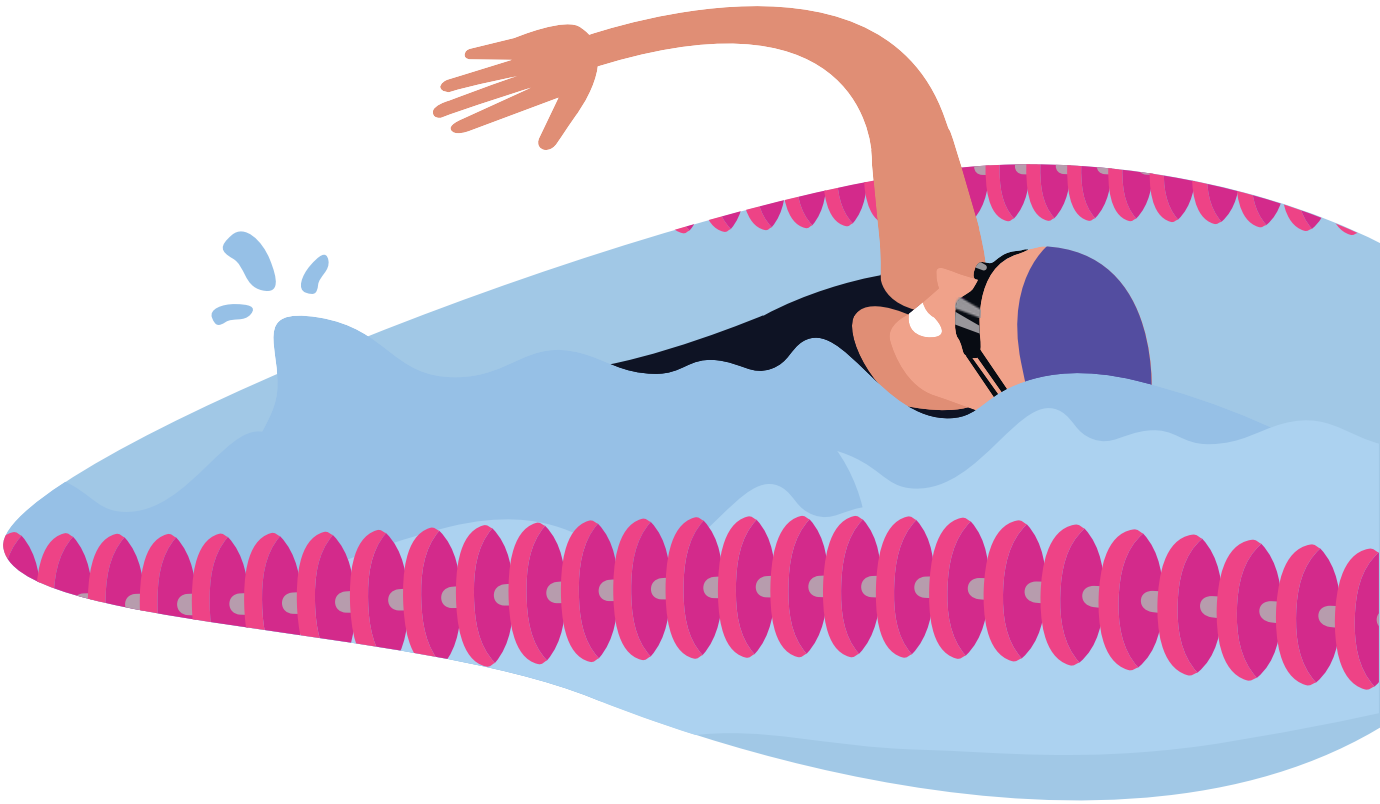
Try the following:

- Be mindful of noise levels (e.g. whistles, music, busy spaces)
- Consider lighting or weather conditions
- Give a heads-up before physical contact in activities
- Offer quieter spaces or alternatives where possible

5. Support Regulation and Provide Break Opportunities

Try the following:

- Allow extra time to process information
- Check in and offer reassurance if needed
- Provide access to breaks or a quiet area
- Keep communication calm and supportive



For further information and support:

Please visit **www.asiam.ie**

Focused Interests and Repetitive Patterns of Behaviour

Autistic people may experience the world in ways that reflect strengths and differences in thinking, processing, and interaction. This can include:

- Experiencing differences in how they understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Preferring predictability and finding it more challenging to anticipate what might happen next
- Processing and responding to concepts such as risk or danger in unique ways
- Engaging with imagination and play in ways that may differ from neurotypical expectations
- Valuing routine and experiencing change or future planning as more effortful
- Finding new or unfamiliar situations require additional time, support, or preparation to navigate comfortably

Supporting Autistic People in Sport and Physical Activity

1. Provide Structure and Predictability

Try the following:

- Share a simple outline of the session (e.g. warm-up, drills, game, cool down)
- Provide a general timetable or overview in advance
- Share photos of the space, equipment, and coaches where possible
- Offer opportunities to visit or observe before taking part
- Give advance notice of any changes

2. Use Clear and Visual Communication

Try the following:

- Use demonstrations, pictures or short videos to show skills
- Keep instructions short, clear, and direct
- Use cones, markers, or equipment to show where to stand or move
- Highlight key points (e.g. where to hold equipment)

3. Offer Choice and Flexible Participation

Try the following:

- Allow participants to observe before joining in
- Offer choices of activities or roles
- Make it okay to take breaks when needed
- Support different ways of taking part (full, partial, or social involvement)