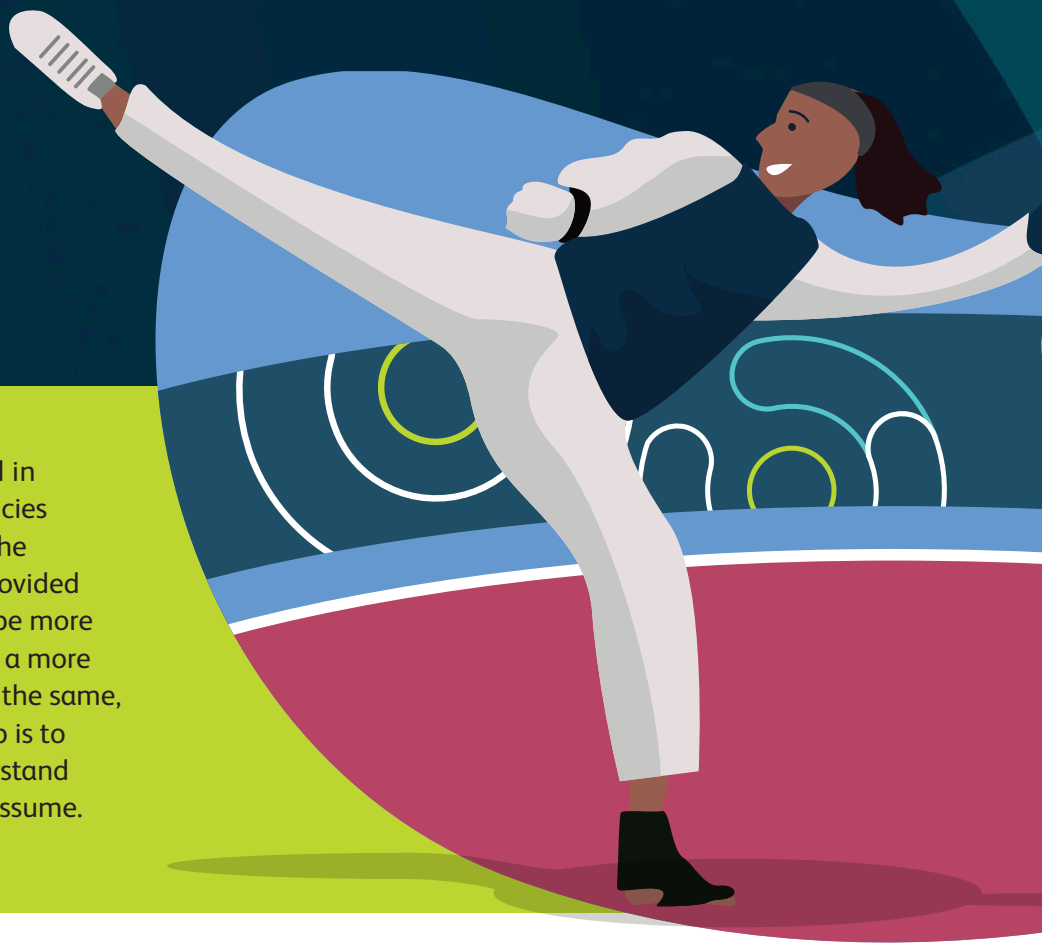
active disability ireland

Factsheet

Autism



This factsheet has been developed in consultation with key national agencies with experience and knowledge in the specific areas. 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.

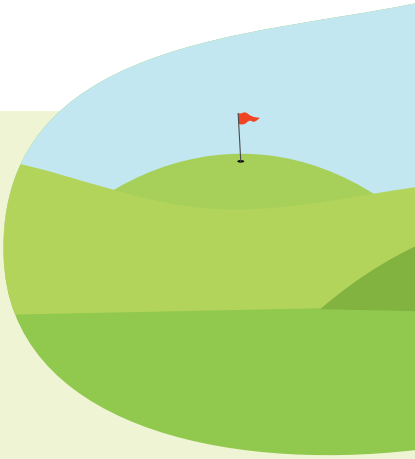
What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how a person communicates and interacts with others. It also affects how a person makes sense of the world around them. Autism is much more common than many people think, '1 in 65 people in Ireland' and autism can be a hidden disability – you can't always tell if someone has autism.

Some of the strong qualities a person with autism can bring to the team are loyalty, dedication, new way of thinking or seeing things from a different perspective.

What We May See When Coaching People Who Have Autism

- A person with autism may use or take other people's things or enter their personal space
- Some people with autism may stay on their own and not join games or activities. They may watch others or remove themselves completely from the area
- Some people with autism might want to follow the rules rigidly and may get distressed if there are any changes in the routine
- A person with autism may have differences in communication and social skills to approach another person and initiate a conversation with them. A person with autism may behave in a way that is perceived to be inappropriate, such as snatching objects away from others to start a chasing game, standing beside other people but not saying anything or saying inappropriate things to get their attention
- A person with autism may become upset easily over seemingly small issues
- A person with autism may talk out of turn, longwinded, off topic, one sided conversations etc.
- A person with autism may misunderstand commonplace phrases or teasing. For example, "pull up our socks", "think on our feet", and "let's get the show on the road"
- A person with autism may misunderstand general instructions such as "let's go in"
- A person with autism may find it hard to focus on the activity and may be easily distracted
- The movements of a person with autism may be uncoordinated and appear clumsy



Social Communication

People with autism may have difficulties with the following areas

- Not understanding or misinterpreting unwritten social rules, e.g. around friendship
- Appearing to be insensitive because they have not recognised how someone is feeling
- Preferring to spend time alone
- Being aloof, distant or uninterested in others
- Not seeking comfort from other people
- Appearing to behave strangely or inappropriately, as they are not always able to express feelings, emotions or needs
- Not speaking, unusual use of language, echolalia, making up words, pronoun reversal – e.g. James looks across the pitch and says to his coach 'you scored a goal'. The ideal coach response would be: Yes James, you did score a goal, well done! James uses 'you' when he should have said 'I'
- Not understanding or misinterpreting 'jokes or sarcasm
- Not understanding or misinterpreting 'common phrases or sayings

Restricted Interest and Repetitive Behaviours:

People with autism may have difficulties with the following areas:

- Being able to understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings and actions
- Predicting what will happen next, or what could happen
- Understanding the concept of danger
- Engaging in imaginative play and activities
- Preparing for change and planning for the future
- Coping in new or unfamiliar situations

How To Include People With Autism In Your Coaching Sessions

1. Give the person plenty of information about the activity before they come to the coaching session

Try the following:

- Provide photos of the facilities/playing area and the coaches/volunteers
- Provide information about what usually happens in the session/activity and a general timetable of what happens
- Provide the rules of the game and information about equipment needed/used
- He/she could visit the room/facility when nobody is there/taking part
- He/she could attend/observe a session without having to participate

2. Use more visuals when coaching

Try the following:

- Use picture cards and/or video clips and/or demonstrations when coaching skills
- If coaching a new drill, let them go last so that they can watch others do the drill first
- Use visual tricks, e.g. put a mark on where they are to hold a hurley
- Use cones/mats/spots to show where they are to stand/sit and where to run to
- Give clear and precise explanations when outlining activities, particularly the rules

3. Have a clear agenda and if there is a need to change, prepare them for it in advance.

Try the following:

- Have a general agenda to a session – e.g. warm up, drills, practice game, cool down
- Write up the agenda for the session – e.g. list of drills, exercises etc. so they know what to expect and are less anxious. You can use a notepad or notebook to do so if you are training outside
- Let them know and prepare for changes - e.g. coach is away next week but Mary will take the session and will write down what will happen

4. Clearly communicate the rules of the session, write them down and have them available if needed.

Try the following:

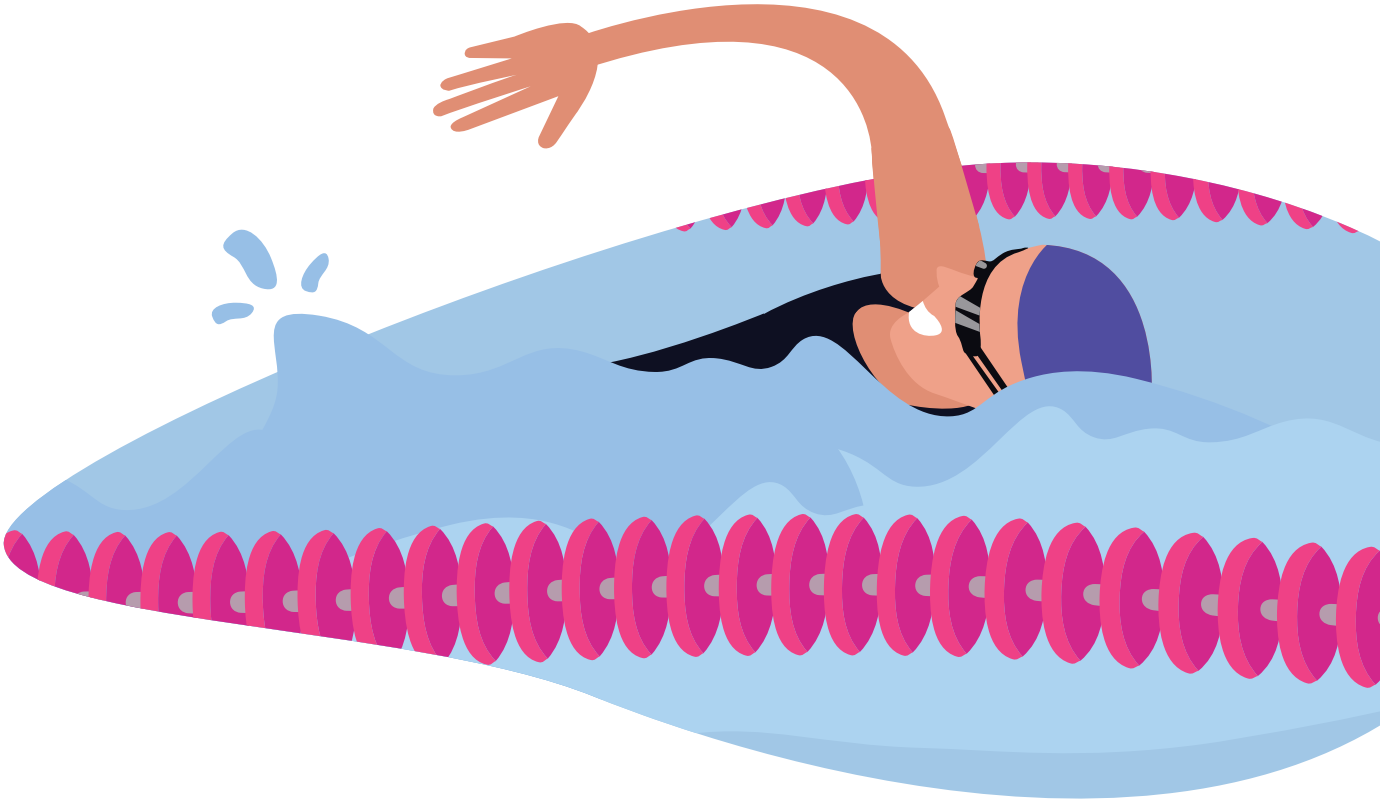
- Be clear about the rules of the sport
- Be clear about safety rules and why these are important
- If incidents do occur, take time with the person to explain why it was unsafe

5. Provide a safe place that he/she can go to have a time out if stressed or overwhelmed.

It is important that they have somewhere they can go if they do feel overwhelmed to regulate themselves so that they can continue with the group if possible.

This might be a bench at the side of the pitch, the hallway, a corner in a room etc.

You may want to have "calming equipment" that they can use to regulate themselves - e.g. fidgets, something I can hold/squeeze in my hand such as a stress ball, water bottle, bean bag, or an exercise ball for them to sit on.



For further information and support:

Please visit **www.asiam.ie**

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